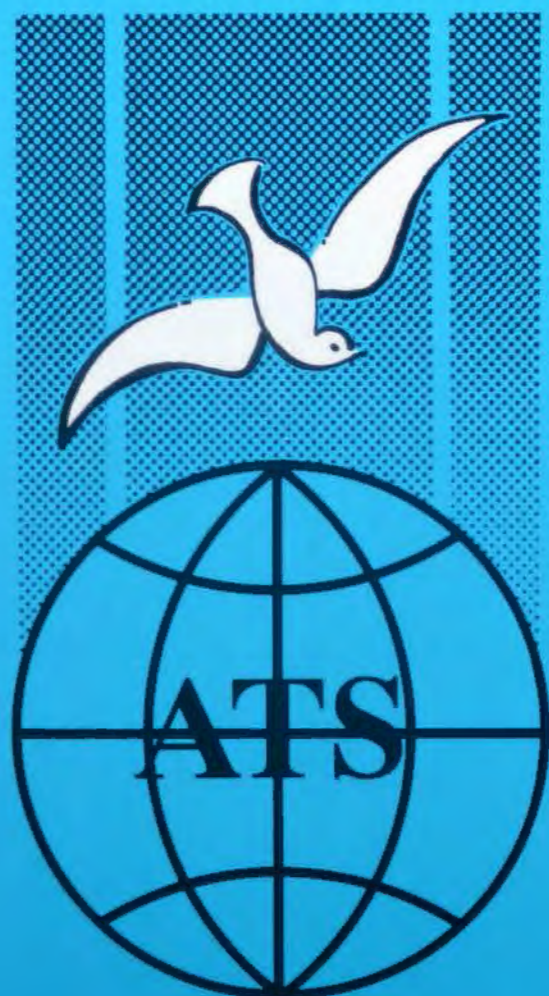


**ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

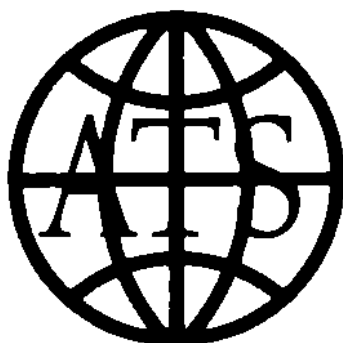
Issues in Revelation and Inspiration



Edited by
Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson

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PREFACE

The Adventist Theological Society has planned for some time to initiate a series of publications under the general title: "Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers" (ATSOC). This volume, dealing with the foundational subject of Revelation/Inspiration, inaugurates the new series.

Since the onstart of the age of the Enlightenment, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament have come under attack and their claims denied. Naturalism has replaced supernaturalism in much of our culture, resulting in radical changes in viewpoints on the part of many Christians regarding the biblical truths of revelation/inspiration. The rationalism of the last two centuries has militated against such clearly revealed Bible teachings as a fiat creation, the reality of miracles, the virgin birth of Christ, His divinity, atoning and substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection, as well as His visible and real return in the clouds of heaven.

Of particular interest have been the alleged contradictions, mistakes, or errors in the Bible which have been used by modernists and higher-critical scholarship time and again as a way to make the Bible more human than it claims, and, thereby, to posit new theories of revelation and inspiration.

Although there has been a gratifying revival of interest in special, divine revelation since the mid-twentieth century, it has been argued by some in recent years that Adventist scholars could use with profit the historical-critical method without adopting its presuppositions. Others have denied the possibility, and in 1986, the Annual Council of the world church (meeting in Rio de Janeiro) opted to turn away from this appeal, summarizing its reason thus: "Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable." (Methods of Bible Study Report, *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987).

A 1991 publication from an Adventist publishing house and written by an Adventist scholar has renewed the discussion of this vital subject of revelation/inspiration, illustrating as it does the fruits of the historical-critical method as carried out by one Adventist scholar on this subject area. Although most of the papers in

this first volume of ATSOC critique this work's position, they should not be construed as a personal attack on the author or the publisher. The issues here are much larger and more crucial than either. At stake is the very authority of the Scriptures and the continued existence of the Seventh-day Adventist people as a Bible-centered, Bible-based movement and church.

Some of the papers included in this volume were read at the annual "Adventist Theological Society Scholars' Meeting" held in Kansas City, Kansas in November 1991 that relate to the topic of this volume from a variety of angles.

It is hoped that the stimulation received from these presentations will turn each reader back to the Scriptures as the Word of God with a clarified understanding of the meaning and significance of "revelation and inspiration." This collection will not exhaust the subject, but we believe it will contribute towards a high view of Scripture which the church must continue to espouse as it presses on in its worldwide mission.

—The Editors

Frank B. Holbrook

Leo Van Dolson

Acknowledgments

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THE REVELATION- INSPIRATION PHENOMENON ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE WRITERS

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Introduction

Few issues are of more crucial significance for Christians than the nature and purpose of God's self-revelation. This is not to say that the doctrine of revelation is the single most important tenet of the Christian faith. There is little doubt, indeed, that the foundational teaching of our faith is that we are all sinners, lost in sin, and saved by sheer grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. And yet, how do we know this if not through revelation, because God has revealed it? This is true of the other precepts of our Adventist faith. Our affirmations regarding creation, the Sabbath, Christ's second coming, and the state of the dead, to mention just a few, are based on God's revelation to man. Without it, we are lost, without God and without hope in the world.

If, indeed, we are reluctant to consider the phenomenon of revelation as the first and foremost biblical doctrine, it remains, however, that whatever we may want to say about God and man results from it. It is undeniably the cornerstone of our grasp and sharing of God, of the way we talk about God. Revelation is unquestionably the keynote for theological thinking today.

The Contemporary Debate

"The dominant problem of contemporary religious thought," wrote Anglican Archbishop William Temple some years ago, "is the problem of revelation. Is there such a thing at all? If there is, what is its mode and form? Is it discoverable in all existing things or only in some? If in some, then in which? And by what principle are those selected as its vehicle? Where is it found?"¹

Communication of Knowledge

Down through the centuries Christians have pointed to two loci of divine revelation, namely, the "book" of nature and the Scriptures. Marred by sin, the former can hardly be interpreted correctly by humans in their state of unrighteousness (see Rom. 1:18 ff.). "Today," writes the servant of the Lord, "man cannot of himself read aright the teaching of nature" (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 462), adding that "apart from Christ we are still incapable of interpreting rightly the language of nature" (*Testimonies*, 8:257). The Bible, on the other hand, was regarded as meeting men and women in their sinful condition, speaking clearly with the authority of God Himself, the rule of faith and practice, pointing to Jesus Christ as Savior. The Scriptures have often been described as special or supernatural revelation over against nature, labeled general or natural revelation.

This is not to say that outside the realm of nature the Bible is the only way in which God has made Himself known. The Scriptures themselves testify to the reality of other modes—or modalities—of revelation, such as dreams (Gen. 28:12; Matt. 1:20), the Urim and the Thummim (Num. 27:21), visions (Num. 12:6), theophanies (Gen. 18:1-2, 13-14), angels (Num. 22:31-35), and Jesus Christ (John 1:18). Notice from the references how early these modalities appear in the history of God's people.

However, the gift of prophecy, granted to His servants the prophets and the apostles, seems to have been one of the most efficient ways chosen by God to disclose Himself to His people (Num. 12:6; Deut. 18:15, 18-22). These prophets, whose ministry climaxed in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, were the instruments used by God to bring the Scriptures into existence.

They provide us with that knowledge *about* God that is *from* God, authoritative and normative.

Redefined As Encounter

In the past 100 years or more this understanding of revelation has come under increasing attack. Under the pressure of an age geared to scientific and rational thought, the traditional concept of revelation has been progressively dismissed as untenable. Theologians have come to depreciate revelation as communication of information from God to the prophets for a more "inner" type of revelation, supposedly more experiential and more enlightened. Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Buber, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and others have in various ways contributed to the development of this view.

Central to this viewpoint is the claim that, over against the conventional understanding of revelation as impartation of knowledge, revelation should be defined as an event occurring *beyond* the information barrier. It is an encounter between God and the prophet, God disclosing Himself to the inner consciousness of the prophet, but with no impartation of information. Thus, the content of revelation is regarded no longer as knowledge *about* God, not even information *from* God, but God Himself. Statements of truth as we find them in the Scriptures, we are told, are merely later reflections on the part of the prophets on the impact God made upon them when the revelational phenomenon occurred, a phenomenon during which nothing was said and nothing was communicated. God is a God who acts, but does not speak.

Thus, according to this view, when God and Moses met on Mount Sinai the Lord did not reveal truths to His servant in the form of propositional statements. Revelation is a personal meeting, an encounter void of information, between two persons, the presence of God to the consciousness of the prophet (in this case, Moses). Leaving the scene of this event and returning to his people, Moses is described as translating this experience into terms relevant to Israel's situation. Reflecting on his encounter Moses writes to provide Israel with the laws and ordinances they need as God's covenant people on the verge of entering the promised land. Hence the information we find written in the Pentateuch is not a commu-

nication from God, but simply a by-product of Moses' own thinking on his encounter with God.

From this perspective, doctrines and teachings as we read them in the Scriptures are not revealed binding statements of truths, but only the prophets' and apostles' own thoughts and meditations on the impact God had made upon them. Though we need them to communicate the faith, no thought or doctrine found in Scriptures, we are told, can or should of itself be truly called revelation, revelation to be listened to and obeyed. They merely *point* to revelation and to Christ. They are not revelation, but a witness to revelation. They bear witness to the fact that God has revealed Himself to the consciousness of individual believers in the past and is eager to do so again. This is why, for many contemporary theologians, the Bible, though not revelation, remains the indispensable medium for God's revelation. At any moment God may use a statement of the biblical writers to speak His word to one of us.

The current debate over revelation, as well as the confusion and disorientation it has brought to many minds, require that we Seventh-day Adventists, who hold that we have been entrusted with the task of proclaiming the everlasting gospel to the world, speak more clearly and earnestly on the issue. Let us attempt, however briefly, to do so.

Revelation: According to the Bible Writers

In spite of the great differences in the ways Christians today understand both the manner and the extent of revelation, there exists an impressive agreement on the fact itself. Common to all Christians is the thought that, indeed, God has disclosed Himself. All take revelation seriously. The basic disagreement has to do with what happens when revelation takes place and the implications of that event.

How shall we determine who is right? How shall we ascertain where the truth lies? The matter is obviously of no minor importance. Our task, however, should not be as arduous as some claim. Since all alike hold that the biblical writers were the recipients of the phenomenon of revelation, why not ask *them* to help us and to tell us what happens when revelation occurs? Why not sit humbly at their feet and let them speak to us out of their first-hand

experience, if indeed they address the issue? This is what I suggest we do.

The fact that no one can read the Bible without presuppositions does not excuse us from a serious examination of a few basic questions. Has God spoken? If indeed He has, what is it that occurs when He thus reveals Himself? Does He share information in the form of propositions or statements of truth which the prophets then share with us? Are the prophets' teachings the product of their own reflection on a sheer I-Thou encounter void of any cognitive dimensions? Once again, what is it that occurs when revelation happens? For the sake of objectivity, we shall limit ourselves to biblical passages where the very vocabulary of "revelation" is used.

Encounter and Communication of Information

If we allow the Bible writers to speak for themselves and listen to what they are saying, we learn, to begin with, that there is such a phenomenon as revelation. Thus, Daniel writes that God "reveals deep and mysterious things" (Dan. 2:22),² to which Nebuchadnezzar echoes: "Truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries" (Dan. 2:47). So God does reveal!

What about the content of such revelations? Note the answer we find as early as the days of Samuel: "The Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh" (1 Sam. 3:21). What was the content of revelation? "The Lord revealed *himself* to Samuel." Encounter theology, therefore, is far from mistaken when it claims that *God* is the content of revelation. This can hardly be denied. God comes close to the prophet. He enters into an I-Thou relationship with him.

But is the encounter void of information? Not according to this very statement which reads fully: "The Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh *by the word of the Lord*." Why the expression, "by the word of the Lord," if it were not that something was said and heard? The same dimension comes through when one listens to Isaiah's testimony, centuries later: "The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears" (Isa. 22:14). Once more the content and purpose of revelation is God Himself. At the same time this sharing of the Lord with His servant, the prophet, takes place in an audible fashion. Someone reveals Himself, that is the content of revelation,

but He does so "in my ears." Words are uttered, statements are made. There is communication of information.

This is very much what Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, whom we mentioned earlier, confirmed. Remember their testimony? In Daniel's words, "he [God] reveals deep and mysterious things" (Dan. 2:22), while Nebuchadnezzar admitted that God is "a revealer of mysteries" (vs. 47). "Things" and "mysteries" are part of the sharing that takes place when revelation occurs. To this Moses added that while the secret *things* belong to the Lord our God, "the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children" (Deut. 29:29).

In the New Testament, Jesus, our Lord, in a most significant statement declares: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Matt. 11:25). Then he added, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father, except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (vs. 27). The two dimensions of revelation find themselves mentioned by Him side by side: Jesus reveals the Father (vs. 27), a Person, who in turn is exalted as revealing "things" to babes (vs. 25). The content of revelation is both a person and things shared, encounter and communication of information, revelation of truths.

To no one's surprise we find such Old and New Testament statements clearly collaborated by the apostle Paul. Writing to the Ephesians about the wondrous truth that Christ has broken down the wall that separated Gentiles from Jews (Eph. 2:13-16), the apostle trusts that the Christians at Ephesus have heard "how the mystery was made known to me by revelation" (Eph. 3:3). He insists that this mystery of Christ "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (vss. 4-5). What is it that happens, according to Paul, when revelation comes to pass? Mysteries, namely, the disclosure of that which would otherwise be unknown, are shared by God with the prophets, which they then convey to believers.

This list could be prolonged. The use of an exhaustive concordance to the Bible will help one find other similar statements. Two

things come clearly in view in answer to our earlier question. Revelation does occur. It is indeed a biblical phenomenon, part of the prophetic ministry. And in revelation God discloses Himself as well as truths about Himself. Who is better informed on the subject than those who underwent the phenomenon? Revelation is both encounter *and* propositional, a meeting and a knowing. It is a disclosure of a Person, as well as of truth.

No wonder, therefore, that prophets refused to describe their testimony as conveying their own message. Some tell us "that the word of the Lord came" to them (Jer. 1:11-13; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1; etc.), or that "the hand of the Lord was upon" them (Ezek. 1:3; 3:22). Others introduce or conclude their messages with a clear "Thus says the Lord" (Amos 1:3; Obad. 1:1; Hag. 1:7; Zech. 12:1; Isa. 7:7; etc.) or variants of "Hear the word of the Lord" (Amos 3:1; Jer. 2:4; Ezek. 6:3; Hos. 4:1; etc.). These and similar constantly repeated formulas are so characteristic of the biblical prophets that they leave no doubt as to the source of their mandate. They are God's chosen agents.

One more observation before proceeding further. It should have become increasingly evident by now that revelation as "word" is eminently concerned with God's plan of redemption. If God's self-disclosures are intended to share truths with His servants, it is because they are directed to an abnormal condition, namely, our sinfulness. Behind God's revelation is His sovereign intention to seek us and to redeem us. Precepts, laws and ordinances, as revealed to the prophets and the apostles, are means chosen by God to bring this truth home and to apply it to our daily walk with Him. Revelation is not merely sheer impartation of knowledge, it is first and foremost a word of life that needs to be forwarded to God's people.

Inspiration: Trustworthy Transmission of Content

Extending the process of divine revelation, God asked the prophets to go one step further and deliver the messages entrusted to them. Revelations, obviously, were not granted to elevate the prophets head and shoulders above the rest of humankind. God's self-disclosures were granted for the purpose of providing His people with guidance regarding salvation and important matters of

daily living in the service of God. "And he said to me," writes Ezekiel, "Son of man, go, get you to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them" (Ezek. 3:4). They were to be God's "prophets," to "speak for" God, to be God's spokespersons. They were men of the Spirit (Hos. 9:7). God had put His Spirit upon them (Isa. 42:1). He would be with their mouths (Exod. 4:15) and would put His words in their mouths (Jer. 1:9). This enabled them to fulfill their mission in a trustworthy manner.

The same Spirit that revealed God and disclosed truth to the prophets empowered them to fulfill their commission. "The spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy," announced Samuel to Saul (1 Sam. 10:6; cf. vs. 10). "As for me," echoes Micah, "I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord" (Mic. 3:8). With enormous courage and amid great danger for their personal lives, God's prophets delivered their messages, guided by the Holy Spirit. Not often with great success, however.

Zechariah, among others, deplored that his contemporaries turned a stubborn ear to his proclamation, refusing as well "the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets" (Zech. 7:12). "Many years thou didst bear with them, and didst warn them by thy Spirit through thy prophets," explains Nehemiah (9:30). These messages were conveyed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so that their statements, oral or written (as we shall see later) were an authentic expression of the divine revelation. God enabled His servants to express in a fully dependable manner what He had disclosed to them.

Generations later the apostle Peter quite clearly reflects the prophets' consciousness in his well-known testimony: "First of all you must understand this that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

What Peter emphasizes here—and what is emphasized in the whole corpus of prophetic writings when this particular topic is addressed—is that the prophets spoke *because* they were "moved by the Holy Spirit". None of their prophetic messages came "by the impulse of man." In other words, their statements were in no case the result of their own meditation, nor of their later reflection on

an allegedly silent encounter with God. This, explains Peter, is of first importance and must be clearly understood. Being moved by the Spirit, the prophets of old spoke for God. This work of the Spirit is what we refer to as "inspiration." A supernatural quality all its own marks the prophetic ministry. Inspiration enables the Bible writers to grasp and to convey in a trustworthy and authoritative manner what God has revealed to them. Inspiration is an enabling work which counterbalances, so to speak, the shortcomings of the prophets and the sinful tendencies of their human nature. Though the term "inspiration" itself hardly appears in Scripture, the concept, as we noticed, is firmly embedded in the Scripture's teaching.

All Scripture Is Inspired by God

Paul refers to the same phenomenon—this time extended to the Scriptures themselves—when he writes that "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Opinions have varied as to whether the passage should be rendered "All Scripture is inspired by God and [therefore] profitable," or "Every scripture inspired by God is also profitable." The question is not without importance, but rather immaterial as far as the purpose of this article is concerned. What is clear is that the apostle sees the work of the Holy Spirit behind the writing of the Old Testament Scriptures. "Inspired by God," literally "God-breathed," is what the biblical writings are, and this, unquestionably, because the prophets themselves were "moved by the Spirit" to return to Peter's expression. Paul and Peter knew what they were writing about, both having been the recipients of the phenomenon.

Referring to the truths that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him (1 Cor. 2:9-10), Paul again states that he imparts them "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). The Spirit is at work in both instances, revealing and inspiring. Ellen G. White testified to the same truth when she wrote: "I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord

brings them before me at the time that He is pleased to have me relate or write them" (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. II, p. 293).

These two pursuits of the Holy Spirit, namely, revelation and inspiration, are so closely intertwined that it is difficult to separate them. Not only is it difficult, but fruitless as well, it seems, to try to know where one ends and the other starts. One may want to distinguish between them for the sake of clarity, but they should never be separated, judging at least from what those who underwent the phenomenon tell us. Revelation-Inspiration are technical terms we use to express dimensions that remain part of the mystery of God's self-disclosure, something of which we should never lose sight. God's relationship to the prophetic message is described as "God-breathed." The message, whether oral or written, is a product of divine inspiration. It owes its existence, as well as its unique quality and authority, to the breath of God. It is of permanent validity, save if God Himself declares otherwise.

Revelation Committed to Writing

Listening to the testimony of the prophets and the apostles, we have noticed that, apart from the incarnation of God the Son, the principal and most efficient form of divine revelation is divine speaking. Although God's culminating revelation to humans is that "in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son," "in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1-2). In concrete situations God's word came to a specific person or group.

This divine speaking, this "Thus says the Lord," produces the word of the Lord. Its product is the word of God, clearly and boldly proclaimed. This is plainly stated by David, "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue," (2 Sam. 23:2). Revelation is encounter, but it is something more. It produces a deposit, something concrete, which in the New Testament is described among other things as "knowledge" (2 Cor. 4:6); "teaching" (Acts 2:42); "instruction" (Rom. 15:4); God's "word" (John 17:14); "the word of truth" (Eph. 1:13) which the apostles share.

But was this "word of truth," orally shared by the prophets and the apostles, to take a written form? Was it to be cast in writing? And if it was, how did this come about? Would revelation-inspira-

tion, once it found embodiment in a written document, be likewise received as the word of God?

According to those who were called to the prophetic/apostolic ministry, the writing down of God's word was the result, again, of His initiative. The first reference to writing occurs in the Book of Exodus. After the Amalekites, who had opposed Israel's passage through their territory, were eventually defeated, God instructed Moses to "Write this as a memorial in a book" (Exod. 17:14). We may assume that Moses wrote a book, as directed by the Lord. In fact, a few chapters further, while Israel encamped before Mount Sinai, we are told that "Moses wrote all the words of the Lord" (Exod. 24:4). Moses' book was expanding. This may very well be how the Pentateuch came into existence. Toward the end of his life, we are told that "Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord" (Deut. 31:9).

Of Joshua, who succeeded Moses, we hear that he too, shortly before his death, "wrote these words in the book of the law of God" (Josh. 24:26). It is not without importance to take notice of the fact that "a book" (Exod. 17:14) seems to have received a name, that is, "the book of the law of God" (Josh. 24:26). Later on the same "book" will be referred to as "the law" (Deut. 1:5; 4:8; 17:18); "the law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 3:2); "the law [or the commandment, or the instruction] of the Lord" (Isa. 5:24; Ps. 119:1; Jer. 8:8; Neh. 9:3); "the book of the law" (Josh. 1:8; 8:34); "the law of God" (Neh. 8:8, 18); "the book of the law of Moses" (Josh. 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kings 14:6; Neh. 8:1); "the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses" (2 Chron. 34:14); "the book of the law of the Lord" (2 Chron. 17:9); "the law, the book of Moses" (2 Chron. 25:4); etc.

Centuries after Moses and Joshua the Lord gave a similar instruction to Jeremiah: "Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer. 30:2). This instruction to write was addressed likewise to the New Testament apostles. Notice, for instance, how often it appears in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12; 3:1, 7; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). Time and again the New Testament authors tell us of their urge to write, whether it be Paul (Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 4:14; 2 Cor. 2:3; Gal. 1:20; etc.), Peter (1 Pet. 5:12; 2 Pet. 3:1), John (1 John 1:4; 1 John 2:12, 26; etc.) or Jude (vs. 3).

The Purpose of a Written Revelation. So far in our quest regarding the phenomenon of written revelation we have been looking only at how it started, wondering who took the initiative. We need to consider *why* the phenomenon occurred in the first place. What purpose did the prophets and the apostles, or God, rather, have in mind? Again, let us allow them to address the question, and consider their testimony. A few examples should suffice.

Moses was the first from what we know, to receive instruction to put things in writing (Exod. 17:14). He tells us that after writing "this law" (Deut. 31:9), he gave it to the priests the sons of Levi and requested that they "read this law before all Israel in their hearing," at the end of every seven years (vss. 10-11). "Assemble the people," was his instruction, "men, women, and little ones," even the foreigners sojourning among them "that they may hear . . . and be careful to do all the words of this law" (vs. 12).

The purpose for written revelation? Moses' answer is clear: That the people may continually hear it, and "be careful to do," that is to say, to put into practice all its words. The Lord will prosper you. He will indeed take delight in prospering you if you turn to Him with all your heart, Moses explained, adding, "obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes, which are written in this book of the law" (Deut. 30:9, 10). Notice how explicitly it is stated, as early as in the very first five books of the Old Testament Scriptures, that what Moses wrote down was the "voice of the Lord, your God," whose commandments are given to govern the life of His people. Clearly, Moses is not sharing his personal testimony, his own feelings, however close he may have been to God. He was sharing God's word with his people.

Permanency of Written Revelation. The statements we have just read shed light on the purpose of written revelation. But were such messages "the voice of the Lord" merely for a particular prophet's contemporaries or for subsequent generations as well? That God's people should be asked to conform to the instructions coming from a prophet living among them should not come as a surprise. But what about later generations? Were they also to abide by such teachings? Very much so, at least according to the prophets.

"Be very steadfast to keep and do all that is written in the book

of the law of Moses," Joshua instructs Israel, shortly before his death (Josh. 23:6). But it may be argued that Moses and Joshua were contemporaries, and too close in time to provide an acceptable answer to our question. Let us, therefore, turn the pages of Scripture and come to the days of David.

Having built houses for himself in Jerusalem, David decided that the time had come to bring the ark of God to a place he had prepared for it in the new capital city of Israel. To do so, and aware of what had occurred earlier (2 Sam. 6:1-7), he ordered the Levites to bring up the ark "in the way that is ordained" (1 Chron. 15:13). Consequently, states the text, "the Levites carried the ark of God upon their shoulders with the poles, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord" (vs. 15). Mark the wording. They strictly followed Moses' instructions, which they regarded as "according to the word of the Lord." What he had commanded, even dealing with the manner in which the ark of the Lord should be carried, was regarded by David not merely as Moses' personal advice but as "the word of the Lord" (see Num. 4:1-6). And that is exactly what it was five hundred years later!

Some one-hundred fifty years after David, Amaziah, king of Judah, was able to wrest his father's throne from the hands of those who had murdered the king. We learn that as soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand, he executed those who had murdered his father, the king. He made an exception, however, the more interesting since it was not without danger. He decided not to put to death the children of these assassins. Why? There is no need to guess. The scriptural account tells us that he did so, "according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, where the Lord commanded, 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, or the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin'" (2 Kings 14:6). The young king trusted God enough to protect his own children against the possible wrath of the murderers' sons, because Moses had written about it more than six-hundred fifty years earlier (Deut. 24:16). Yet, he did not act thus merely because it was Moses' personal instruction, or from faithfulness to an ancient Jewish tradition. He did so specifically, as the text tells us, because this was what "the Lord commanded" (vs. 6). And this, more than 600 years after Moses' death!

More examples could be added showing that the word of the Lord is indeed binding beyond the limits of a prophet's own days. Generations later it remains normative, the word of God. The prophets' messages and teachings remain long after the day of their original proclamation, because what they share is God's word. Even prophets, who might consider themselves as fresh and more relevant channels of divine revelation (and on that basis freed from earlier prophetic messages) were enjoined by God not to deviate from previous revelations.

Be "careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go," was God's instruction to Joshua (Josh. 1:7). Joshua was further directed not to abandon the written revelations ("this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth") but to meditate on them "day and night" and to make certain that whatever he, Joshua, would say would be in full harmony with Moses' teachings (vs. 8). "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel," God said through the prophet Malachi, the last of the Old Testament writers (Malachi 4:4). God's word remains in permanent force unless He points out otherwise.

Is the Old Testament God's Word Today?

Do such instructions apply to Christians too? To be more specific, are the Old Testament writings binding for Christians whom many regard as being no longer under law, but under grace? Did not our Lord's death radically alter the substance of God's message to humankind? While various answers from many schools of thought have been suggested, those whom God called to the prophetic ministry in the early church, namely, the apostles (not to mention Jesus Christ our Lord), have not left us in darkness on this point.

Convinced that in the person of Jesus Christ a new era of revelation had dawned upon them, early Christian believers, led by the apostles, broke away from the Jewish leaders who had crucified their Lord and from their interpretation of Scripture. This did not lead them, however, to steer away from the Jewish Scriptures. On

the contrary. Though the Lord had been crucified some thirty years earlier, the Old Testament writings, in the eyes of Paul, were still "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). They were "holy" (Rom. 1:2), because they partook of the character of God.

Whether God was specifically identified as the author of a particular message had little to do with it. And this seems to have been the view from the earliest days of the Christian church. Thus, quoting an Old Testament statement (in this case Ps. 2:1-2, which provides us with no indication as to who authored these verses) early believers in Jerusalem did not hesitate to say that "by the mouth of our father David," God "didst say by the Holy Spirit" that rulers would gather together against the Lord and His Anointed (Acts 4:24-26). God was the Author of the second psalm through David. Notice how naturally the early church at Jerusalem acknowledged that what Scripture says is what God says.

The same is true the other way around. What God is specifically declared as saying in an Old Testament passage, such as Exod. 9:16 for instance, is introduced by the apostle Paul as "Scripture says" (Rom. 9:17). This is possible only if one regards the Old Testament Scriptures as the product of divine self-revelation. One should not be surprised; therefore, if time after time, rather than referring to their human authors, the prophets, New Testament writers introduce quotations of the Old Testament by referring directly to God or the Holy Spirit as the speaker (Heb. 1:5, 13; 3:7; 10:15-17; etc.). For them, more than thirty years after Christ's death, the Old Testament was still the word of God. Christ's death has brought no change to that effect.

Moreover, by using "it is written" or similar formulas to introduce Old Testament assertions, the apostles, Paul in particular (some 16 times in the Epistle to the Romans alone), underlined the perennial value and function of the Old Testament. Let us keep in mind that the original expression, "it is written," goes far beyond its modern translations. It literally means "it has been written and still stands written," thus showing, when they are quoted, the lasting and enduring ministry of the Old Testament writings for Christians as well as Jews.

It is well known that this was very much Jesus' own attitude toward the Old Testament. He often used "it is written" in reference

to the Old Testament (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 11:10; 26:24; Mark 9:12; 11:17; Luke 7:27; 18:31; etc.), thus emphasizing its normative value. Our Lord was so convinced that the Old Testament was the word of God, He was so committed to its divine authority, that regardless of what it might cost Him, He determined that this divine word would be perfectly fulfilled in Him (thus Luke 18:31; 24:44; Matt. 26:31, etc.). Christ's commitment to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures would have had an immense influence on His disciples, and should likewise on us.

It is also important to notice that nowhere do we find Christ, or the apostles, trying to sort between this and that Old Testament writer or statement. In their view the whole body of Old Testament writings is normative and authoritative.

Nowhere in the Gospels, for instance, do we find the equivalent of some contemporary critics who characterize various parts of Scripture as unreliable, more particularly in its historical accounts. From "the creation of the world" to "this generation" Jesus accepted the entire Old Testament without reserve and consistently treated its historical narratives as straightforward records of facts, whether referring to Noah (Matt. 24:37-39), Abraham (John 8:56), Lot (Luke 17:28-32), or Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41) among others, not to mention the creation of Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4-5). He treated all parts of the Old Testament equally as history, often setting the stamp of His approval on narratives that would be unacceptable to the modern mind.

Our Lord accepted the *entire* Old Testament without reservation. Encountering two disappointed disciples on their way to Emmaus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Does this mean that He had little room for the third section of the Hebrew Scriptures which contained such books as the Psalms and the Book of Proverbs? Not at all. In the same passage we are told that a few hours later, in a meeting with the eleven, Jesus reminded them that "everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). To Him the Old Testament was, without distinction, the true and authoritative word of God in its entirety.

The apostles' attitude toward the Old Testament, as we noted

earlier, was likewise one of respect. They constantly cite "Scripture" (in the New Testament the term is used some fifty times in either the singular or plural form) and whenever they do so they quote it authoritatively. It is an absolute, not a relative, authority. They accept it as speaking with a unified voice and show no intention of placing one Old Testament statement against another.

True, just as our Lord, they were selective in the passages they quoted. This does not mean, however, that they did not regard the others as authoritative. Under the guidance of the Spirit they used the Old Testament statements that were most relevant to their purposes, just as *we* do today. None of this implies any downgrading of the passages or books they did not quote. Paul summed up their attitude toward the Old Testament quite clearly when he stated that "all scripture is inspired by God."

Christ's testimony, as well as that of the apostles, is overwhelmingly explicit: the Old Testament remains the word of God for Christians just as it was for the sons of Abraham. Some of its teachings have come to an end, to be sure. But God alone, as Author and Initiator of the revelation-inspiration phenomenon, is qualified to say when a particular message has become obsolete or no longer applies. And He has done so, as in the case of circumcision, the sanctuary services, and the Jewish theocracy. Clear instructions have been given to us by means of the prophetic ministry. Short of this, no human is entitled to sift between what is to be observed and what may be discarded. God's word lasts forever.

What About the New Testament Writings?

What about the New Testament writings? We noticed earlier that the apostles' anointing to write was not essentially different in nature and purpose from that of their Old Testament counterparts. Guided by the Spirit, they were eager to share the uniqueness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and to apply it to the vocation and daily needs of the early Christian believers.

Thus, to the Corinthians, Paul writes to admonish them as his beloved children (1 Cor. 4:14), hoping they will understand fully and be ready for the day of the Lord (2 Cor. 1:13-14). With the Philippian believers he shares what he thinks will save them from evildoers (Phil. 3:1-2), while to Timothy he sends instructions (1 Tim. 3:14).

John, for his part, writes so that "our joy may be complete" (1 John 1:4), and to protect his readers from "those who might deceive them" (1 John 2:26), while Jude too finds it necessary, appealing to those who are beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, "to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

There is, indeed, an undergirding concern that with the passing years the saints might depart from the original faith and embrace teachings that are "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:10), and no longer "accord with godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3). Peter, likewise, though he recognizes that his readers are firmly "established in the truth" wants to remind them of "these things" (2 Pet. 1:12-13). Aware of the fact that the time of their own departure may be near (2 Tim. 4:6-8; 2 Pet. 1:13-14), the apostles wanted to make sure that "the sound words" which the early believers had heard from the beginning (2 Tim. 1:13) would be held firm (Titus 1:9), and "the truth" guarded "in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). The purpose of their writings, not to mention the gospels and the book of Acts, (see, for instance, Luke 1:4 and Acts 1:1-5), is quite clear: the need to share with Christian believers "either by word of mouth or by letter" what the Lord had entrusted unto them (2 Thess. 2:15).

This, however, was no mere testimony of faith which believers were free to accede to or to dismiss according to their own inner spiritual experience. The apostolic message was no mere personal reflection on an encounter event with the Lord. It was "the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7); "the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 1:17); "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4); "the word of truth" (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; James 1:18); "the truth of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:10) or "of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5); "the truth that is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). This gospel of truth was to be believed (2 Thess. 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:3), loved (2 Thess. 2:10) and obeyed through the Spirit (Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:22). This "truth" some opposed it (2 Tim. 3:8), turned away from it and rejected it (2 Tim. 4:4; 2:18; Titus 1:14; James 5:19). At the same time, however, true disciples of Christ are "of the truth" (1 John 3:19), "follow the truth" (2 John 3-4; 2 John 4), and are established

in it (2 Pet. 1:12). That truth abides in them and will be with them forever (2 John 2).

The apostolic message was no mere inner reflection on God's decisive acts even in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was no mere encounter in which God was known but nothing was said. It came "through a revelation of Jesus Christ," affirms Paul (Gal. 1:12), in which "God was pleased to reveal his son" to the apostle (vs. 16). As noticed earlier, God's mystery "was made known" to Paul "by revelation," (Eph. 3:3), which granted him an unusual "insight into the mystery of Christ" (vs. 4). This mystery revealed to Paul, "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (vs. 5). Here revelation and knowledge, Christ and mystery, are referred to side by side.

As in Old Testament times, revelation meant encounter, it was God personally within the soul of the apostle, addressing him with the majesty of His word and truths that called for a response. Revelation was a disclosure of a Person, and the communication of data about God and man. Something was made *known*, something was said, and what was said became the root and ground of the apostolic message and of our knowledge of God. A true word of God was given, which could be proclaimed and eventually reproduced as Scripture. This was the word of God to which we just referred, not merely becoming the word of God if and when Paul's listeners accepted it, but altogether the word of God apart from the response it may evoke, whether of faith or unbelief. This apostolic message "according to the revelation of the mystery" which had been disclosed was now "made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith," concludes Paul (Rom. 16:25-26).

The Obedience of Faith

This "obedience of faith" is indeed what the New Testament writers expected from those who accorded their oral or written presentation of the gospel the authority of divine revelation. Had not the Lord Himself commissioned them to make disciples, baptizing them, and "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"? (Matt. 29:19-20). Thus, conscious of speaking with the Lord's

authority, Paul adjures his readers "that this letter be read to all the brethren" (1 Thess. 5:27). The letters he writes have unquestionable authority. They express indeed the character and limits of the Christian fellowship, as shown in the following statement to the believers in Thessalonica: "If anyone refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with Him" (2 Thess. 3:14). Note that Paul expects obedience and that whoever refuses to *obey* no longer belongs to the Christian community. He should not be regarded as an enemy, specifies the apostle (vs. 15), but he is no longer entitled to be regarded as a disciple of Jesus Christ. These are strong words that many would prefer to ignore.

What about those among us who are spiritually mature, who have grown in Christ, and like the early believers in Corinth might claim to have received some gift of the Spirit? Isn't that proof enough that they no longer need the apostles' admonition, that they have grown beyond that elementary stage, and are in direct and personal communication with God? To those Paul writes, quite specifically: "If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). "A command of the Lord" is indeed how the apostles perceived their writings, written with the authority of unique witnesses of a unique event, namely, Christ; written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as were the Old Testament Scriptures.

Whether the phenomenon of revelation, as such, be specifically referred to or not, or whether the dimension of inspiration be in each instance mentioned, remains immaterial, nor is it our task to engage in this kind of distinction. The apostles are conscious that they are God's messengers, "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Their message is God's word.

Christianity is a religion of revelation. This clearly rests on the teaching of Christ, the apostles and the prophets. When we turn to the Bible, there is compelling evidence that it is the voice of God, not a compilation of narratives and teachings dreamed up from its human authors' own best insights. For them, it was certain that God spoke, that He had chosen to reveal Himself to them, pointing the way to Christ and to redemption, and sharing His will with them.

In a generation so prone to demand from God the kind of revelation they think they ought to have instead of being grateful for the one God has seen fit to grant us, our task is to receive it as such and to let it work within us, leading us to an increasingly close relationship with God, especially in these last days.

"We also thank God constantly for this," writes Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians, "that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13). May we show the same spiritual discernment, unreservedly, and accepting the prophets' and the apostles' message as the word of God, fulfill the apostle's prayer that we "lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

Endnotes

¹ William Temple, "Revelation" in *Revelation*, edited by John Baillie and Hugh Martin. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 83.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, 1946, 1952 editions. Italicized words or phrases in these quotations are supplied.

AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF ALDEN THOMPSON'S CASEBOOK/CODEBOOK APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

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Introduction

The book *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991) by Alden Thompson deserves attention for a number of reasons. First, it is a recent book by a Seventh-day Adventist on the subject of biblical inspiration. Consequently, it has received wide promotion within North American Adventist circles.

Second, since a person's position on the Bible's inspiration affects positions on many other theological issues, the theory espoused in this book holds a potential impact on Adventist thought and practice.¹ The author himself suggests that his book is written "unashamedly for Adventists—for the ultimate purpose of enhancing our outreach and mission to the world" (pp. 19, 20).²

The above reasons call for an evaluation of his work. I am further encouraged in this effort by the author's invitation to readers to engage him in discussion about the views he has espoused. He writes: "I would hope that this book would help as a guide and as a spur to further study and discussion" (p. 250). In the true spirit of Seventh-day Adventism, Thompson urges: "If our

[Adventist] position on inspiration needs revision, let us set about revising it" (p. 145).

It is in response to this invitation that I attempt, here, to analyze and evaluate the model of Scripture that our author recommends to the Adventist church. While this review is not intended to be **exhaustive**, the concerns raised in the evaluative section of the paper are **illustrative** of the kinds of questions that need to be addressed in works dealing with the authority of the Bible. Hopefully, we will not only clarify some of the issues raised in this particular study, but we will also enhance "further study and discussion."³

Description and Analysis

Purpose for Writing

Our author is not unaware of "the continuing trickle of crises over the inspiration issue" (p. 13), nor is he unmindful of "how volatile the topics of revelation and inspiration can be" (p. 15).⁴ He explains that part of his rationale for sharing his thoughts "is the growing conviction that Adventists are in a unique position to contribute positively to the current debate over inspiration raging among Protestants" (p. 17).

Another objective the author desires to accomplish in his book is to provide "a welcome common ground" that will heal the division that has resulted in the [SDA] Church on the issue of biblical authority. He explains that the approach to Scripture that he is proposing will have the advantage of appealing to "'liberals' and 'conservatives' alike, allowing the openness to the human in Scripture, as stressed by the 'liberals' but within a secure framework ensuring wholehearted recognition of God's presence and action, as stressed by the 'conservatives'" (p. 143).⁵

According to the author, besides Ellen G. White, who has struck a balance between these two extremes, "My study of the literature currently available on the topic of inspiration had led me to conclude that a truly incarnational model is hard to find" (p. 17). It is in response to this need that he presents a "practical" view of the nature of Scripture, that is supposed to recognize the human element while retaining the divine authority of the Word. He refers to this as the "incarnational" model of Scripture: "A *practical*

approach using the *incarnational* model allows for the mysterious blending of the human and divine" (p. 220, emphasis his). The corresponding method proposed for interpreting Scripture is the "casebook" approach (pp.108 ff.).

Throughout his book, Thompson presents himself as a "conservative" SDA Christian (p. 19; cf. p. 312) who has come to recognize some nagging problems in the Bible and seeks to do something about them (pp. 13-15). It is partly to show his conservative Adventist credentials that he begins his work by quoting two lengthy articles by Ellen G. White on the subject of biblical inspiration.

Organization of the Book

Besides Part I, which deals with selected sections of Ellen G. White (1SM 15-23, and GC v-xii), and the Appendices (pp. 267-317), which summarize and amplify the authors' views, *Inspiration* is divided into three major sections:

Part II (chapters 1-8) deals with the *theory* upon which the author's "Practical" Approach to Scripture is based.

Part III (chapters 9-19) *illustrates* the theory.

Part IV (chapters 20-21) *applies* the theory to the Christian experience and the life of the church.

Thompson repeatedly urges his readers to read Part II (chapters 1-8, the *theoretical* part) before reading Part III, the *illustration* section (chapters 9-19). The "framework" that is laid out in Part II allows the illustrations in Part III to "make good sense" (p. 145).⁶

Because the edifice erected in Parts III and IV build upon the theoretical foundation he has constructed in Part II, my analysis will begin with the latter.

Methodology

Parallel Accounts. Although the author seeks to "examine many aspects of revelation and inspiration, the parallel accounts in Scripture itself are perhaps most helpful in revealing how God actually has sent us His Book" (p. 15). The same point is later underscored again: "The parallel passages in Scripture are by far the most significant ones for developing an adequate view of inspiration" (p. 247). Furthermore, "The parallel passages are very

useful in establishing the boundaries of any inspiration theory" (p. 250).

Why are the parallel accounts the most helpful in constructing a theory of inspiration? According to our author, "In parallel texts we will observe 'differences' between them" (p. 145). He explains that, "the differences in minor details that show up in parallel accounts [are] simply because imperfect human beings are part of the transmission process" (p. 173).

"Differences" Explained. What does our author mean by "differences" in the Biblical text? By this term, he is referring to alleged "errors," "mistakes," and "contradictions" in the Bible. Since these latter words are "inflammatory," the author prefers the more "friendly" word "differences" (pp. 144-145; 249-250). It should be remembered by the reader, however, that whenever he talks about "differences," he has in mind apparent "contradictions," "mistakes," "inaccuracies," or "errors" that he has discovered in the Bible.

It is on the basis of these alleged "contradictions" that the author develops his theory of revelation-inspiration.⁷ In other words, if the so-called "differences" or "human imperfections" are really not what he claims they are, his whole theory of revelation-inspiration will break down.

If anyone should question his assertion that the "differences" are "because of imperfect human beings" who are part of the transmission process (p. 173), the author appeals to a statement by Ellen White: "Everything that is human is imperfect" (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 20).

Thus, in an attempt to understand the nature of Biblical inspiration, the author adopts an inductive method, which constructs its view of inspiration on the basis of the so-called "phenomena of Scripture"—the technical name given to alleged "inconsistencies," "contradictions," "mistakes," "errors," or "imperfections" in the Bible. Another way to look at the author's approach is to liken it to the attempts of persons who construct their doctrine of the Sabbath upon Colossians 2:16 or those who seek to establish their theology on the state of the dead from Christ's parable about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16).

Let us summarize the steps that the author takes in developing his theory of inspiration:

1. The Scriptures are read to identify "differences" in parallel accounts.

2. These "differences" are believed to be "imperfections" resulting from the transmission (writing) process.

3. Recognizing that the Bible is not only divine but human as well, and that "everything human is imperfect," the author constructs a theory of revelation and inspiration to explain the human dimension of Scripture.

4. Once his theory of revelation-inspiration is constructed, the author uses the "parallel accounts" to validate his theory.

As noted above, if the initial judgment regarding the so-called "differences" or "human imperfections" in parallel accounts of the Bible is wrong, the author's whole theory of revelation-inspiration will break down. In other words, the author's view of revelation-inspiration is built on an assumption that he understands the Scriptures well enough to decide when and where there are "contradictions" or "differences."

Based on the above assumptions, the book *Inspiration* develops an "incarnational model" of the Bible. This model or paradigm is an attempt to present the Bible as fully human and divine, just as Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God was fully human and divine. However, the author redefines the meaning of the word "incarnation" in its reference to the Bible. In order to understand and evaluate this "incarnational model" we must first see how he defines and describes certain key terms in the doctrine of Scripture.

Understanding Key Theological Terms

Revelation. In contrast to general revelation, in which God reveals himself in His created works in nature, our discussion deals with what is specified as "special revelation," the kind that is operative in the Bible. It is this special revelation that we are concerned about.

The author defines revelation as "some kind of special input from God, a message from Him to His creatures on earth" (p. 47). It is "a visible or audible intervention by God" (p. 57), usually in the form of visions, dreams, and theophanies. The author, however,

does not clearly tell his readers whether the Bible writer understands fully this "special input" or "intervention from God."

On the basis of the author's definition of revelation, many books of the Bible cannot be termed the product of direct divine revelation: "Clearly, not all that we have in Scripture comes as a result of direct and special revelation" (p. 158). Books such as Chronicles, Luke, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, etc. may be termed "Spirit-led research, not revelation in the technical sense" (p. 48). This point is very important for his consequent "incarnational" model of Scripture. The author himself states that this understanding of revelation "may be the most crucial point in the whole book." He underscores this point in italics when he writes: "*The Bible does not say that all Scripture was given by revelation*" (p. 48).

Why is this point so crucial for this particular theory of revelation-inspiration? Apparently, if there are mistakes or "imperfections" in the Bible, they are likely to show up in the areas where no revelation occurred—that is, where there was no "direct intervention by God." Secondly, it gives readers of the Bible the right to search and to discover which parts of Scripture are revelation and which parts are not. He writes: "When we read the Bible perceptively, we discover hints that enable us to know where revelation occurred and where it did not" (p. 48).

What are some implications of this view of revelation for the authority of the Bible? Apparently, the author does not consider all parts of the Bible to carry full authority. He does not say so in explicit terms; rather, in his characteristic manner of carefully wording his statements, he writes:

In short, prophetic messages *can* have full authority without necessarily being based on a specific supernatural revelation. Where Scripture claims revelation, let's accept it. But much of Scripture makes no such claim. We need to remember that when we study historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles. Inspiration? Always. Revelation? Sometimes—and most certainly when the Bible tells us so (p. 49, emphasis mine).

If prophetic messages "can have full authority without necessarily being based on a specific supernatural revelation," is it possible that at other times or in some instances they **do not** have full authority? In other words, is the **whole** biblical message trust-

worthy since part of it was not supernaturally revealed? If the author thinks so, why does he suggest that, in our perceptive study of "historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles" (p. 49), we can "know where revelation occurred and where it did not" (p. 48)?

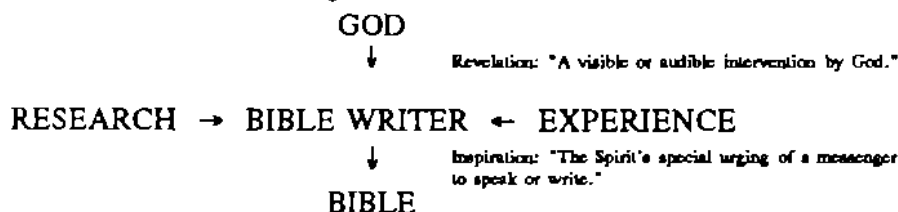
Inspiration. Our author defines inspiration as "the Spirit's special urging of a messenger to speak or write" (p. 57). The term is "simply a means of indicating that the Holy Spirit has been active in a special way" (p. 56). Elsewhere he declares: "An inspired writer is one who is 'fired up' to speak for God" (p. 53).

It is noteworthy that this definition is not based on any careful study of the Scriptural texts such as 2 Tim. 3:15-17 and 2 Pet. 1:16-21. Is Thompson's definition adequate? Does the Holy Spirit's "special urging" or firing-up activity render the message (oral or written) delivered by the Bible writer fully trustworthy and dependable? The author's answer to this question is directly related to his understanding regarding the **sources** of the inspired writer's message.

In answer to his own question, "Where does the [inspired writer's] message come from?" he writes, "from revelation, from research, from experience" (p. 53; cf. p. 158). Thus, in addition to "revelation" and "Spirit-led research," our author introduces a third source of the Bible writers' message, namely, experience. Thus, books such as Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes "represent the voice of experience filtered through two quite different temperaments" (p. 154).⁸

Irrespective of the source of the message however, the inspired writers, "driven by the Spirit. . . see a need and must speak. But they use their own words, their own logic, and their own rhetoric regardless of how flawed their human tools may be" (p. 53).

The author's understanding of revelation and inspiration may be sketched schematically as follows:



We know of God's direct supernatural "intervention" in revelation; but where is God in the inspiration process when the inspired messenger employs his human tools (logic, rhetoric, etc.)? According to our author, "Regardless of the methods used, we believe the Spirit has guided the entire process" (p. 167). "God stays close enough to the writers so that the point comes through clear enough" (p. 53), so that "even a generous sprinkling of 'human imperfections' in the text need not keep the message from coming through loud and clear" (p. 70).

If in inspiration God remains "close enough" to the Bible writers and enables their messages to come through "clear enough," why then does our author emphatically state: "Yes, we can grade them [the Bible writers]. We can say which ones are hotter, which ones are smokier" (p. 54)? His answer is simple; it is because "the quality of their literary endeavors varies in content and mechanics, though I would hasten to add that God never allows them to drop below the 'pass' level, C-/C-" (p. 53).

These definitions of revelation and inspiration logically lead our author to judge the "quality" of the Bible's message according to (a) its **content** and (b) its **mechanics**. It is important to remember also that during the inspiration process, "God never allows" the over all message [content + mechanics] to suffer substantially [i. e. drop below the C-/C- 'pass' level].

How does the author know a text cannot fall below C-/C- level? Later in his casebook-codebook discussion, he will explain the criteria he employs in grading the quality of the "different" Biblical messages.

We would also be interested to know how the Holy Spirit can "inspire" a message that is fraught with "a generous sprinkling of 'human imperfections' in the text" (p. 70) and still have a trustworthy and dependable text. In other words, can God put His stamp of approval on a document that contains faulty content and faulty mechanics? Our author's response is based on his view of the term "accommodation."

Accommodation. In everyday language, "accommodation" means an adaptation or adjustment to an existing situation—whether good or bad. In discussions on the doctrine of Scripture, however, the term "accommodation" is employed in a technical

sense. It is also interpreted differently by those who are theologically liberal as compared to Bible-believing Christians.⁹ How does our author understand the meaning of this term?

Even though he does not **define** its theological meaning, his **use** of the word seems to suggest that God adapts His truth to the prevailing opinions of an existing culture—even if those opinions are wrong (pp. 121,125).

The author's understanding of "accommodation" is clarified in the analogy he draws between a good mechanic and God. He argues that just as the mechanic is prepared to "adapt to circumstances" and "rig up all kinds of substitutes" to make a car run, "so it is with God's Word" (p. 70). The practical purpose of God's Word requires that sometimes God makes use of "absolute precision" [revelation?], and "sometimes for rough approximation [imperfections due to research, experience, and inadequate mechanics of presentation?]" (p. 70).

Our author seems to say that in the writing of the Scriptures, God was willing to "accommodate" Himself to all kinds of human "substitutes"—the prevalent views and language of the Bible writer (whether right or wrong)—as long as He got through the message He wanted to present.¹⁰ God could "certainly have chosen a more effective means" of communicating His Word, "but He has elected to use human weakness as a bridge between the Almighty and His fallen creation" (p. 144).

It is in this context that the author discusses, besides imperfections in content and mechanics, two other kinds of "human imperfections in Scripture:" (a) differences in parallel accounts and (b) copyist errors or even well-intentioned scribal slips.

As noted earlier, throughout the book, a deliberate effort is made to refrain from referring to these "imperfections" of the Bible as "errors," "mistakes," or "contradictions." It is explained that, these words are "inflammatory words" and cause problems for some people (pp. 249-250). Therefore, he proposes to use "gentle, friendly words when describing Scripture" (pp. 144, 145). The friendly words he prefers include: "differences," "problems," "flaws," and "certain phenomena" (pp. 18, 19, 70, 144).¹¹

How does God view these "imperfections" in the Bible? The author maintains that God is not bothered at all. He treats them

with a “twinkle” in His eyes (p. 70). The Bible is a “Heavenly message in Earthen Vessels” (chapter 6). Despite the “generous sprinkling of ‘human imperfections’ in the text” (p. 70), the message comes through “loud and clear.” He writes:

The diversity in Scripture, which seems to approach outright contradiction at times, is part of God’s plan to be all things to all people that by all means He might save some (1 Cor. 9:22) (p. 261).

Thus, on the basis of this understanding of revelation, inspiration, and accommodation, our author arrives at a view of Scripture in which “the diversity” (another euphemism for “differences” or “inaccuracies”?) in the Bible approaches “outright contradiction at times.” This position runs contrary to Ellen G. White’s statement:

As several [biblical] writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns underlying harmony (*Great Controversy*, p. vi).

Having argued that there are “outright contradictions at times” in Scripture, Dr. Thompson moves on to explain his particular “incarnational” view of Scripture, a model in which he attempts to blend the human and the divine aspects of the Bible.

An “Incarnational Model” of Scripture

There are two key aspects addressed by the author’s “incarnational model” of Scripture: (1) the nature of the biblical text and (2) the needs of the human experience (p. 88). Each deserves some attention.

The Nature of the Biblical Text. As far as the *biblical text* is concerned, it is both human and divine. There are no problems with the divine aspect of Scripture; it is the “treasure” that contains, “the glory of divine power.” The major problem has to do with its “human side”—the “earthen vessel” that contains “human imperfections” (p. 19).

It may be helpful to restate why the human side of Scripture contains “imperfections.” First, the source of the message may be flawed (due to the human factor in research and experience, and

possibly in comprehending a direct revelation). Second, in the conveying of the message, the Bible writer's mechanics of delivery (logic, rhetoric, etc.) may be faulty. Besides these imperfections that originate with the writer himself, there are copyist errors and even well-intentioned scribal slips.

We were already told that God is not bothered by these human imperfections. But what about the human reader? Should a person be concerned about "the traces of humanity we find in the Bible" (p. 16)? How must one deal with these imperfections "we *actually* find in Scripture" (p. 88)? The author's answers to these questions lead to the second vital key of his incarnational model—the needs of human experience.

The Needs of Human Experience. The attitude that a Christian adopts towards the humanity of Scripture (read "errors," "mistakes," "contradictions") is directly related to his or her "temperament, background, and personality" (p. 95). It is thus, rather subjective.

Two sociological models of authority structures—democratic vs. authoritarian—are selected as perfect illustrations of how individuals have responded to the humanity of Scripture (pp. 90-95). It is asserted that those who have experienced authoritarian structures (such as German Adventists) have an "authoritarian view of Scripture. Thus, the Bible's authority is undermined for them if they find 'flaws or errors' in it" (p. 92-94).

This authoritarian tendency works against an incarnational view of Scripture. If the human side of Scripture becomes too obvious, or if the diversity in Scripture makes it appear that its mandates are not clear and that human beings have the freedom to choose whether or not they should obey, the authority of Scripture is at risk. (pp. 97).

This is the reason why "among German Adventists, for example, I found very little enthusiasm for an incarnational model of inspiration" (p. 94).

On the other hand, those under democratic influences, (such as American Adventist scholars) can deal with the occasional mistakes in Scripture. This is because their view of authority is "based on goodness, not power," and they are more accustomed to seeing flaws in their national authority figures (p. 91). The author, therefore, asserts: "One of the special contributions that American

Adventist scholars have to make, I believe, is in articulating a truly incarnational model of inspiration, one that avoids the two dogmatic extremes" (p. 95). The two extremes he talks about are positions held by radical critics, who see the Bible as thoroughly human, and fundamentalists, who view the Bible as thoroughly divine (p. 94).

It must be clear to the reader that the author's particular "incarnational model" is not based on the true Scriptural analogy between the Bible and the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ in His incarnation.¹² Instead, the "incarnational model" of Scripture presented by the author is established on a sociological model, which he claims is best understood and accepted by those who appreciate "democratic" principles. If a person does not accept the author's view of Scripture, it may be an indication that he or she has an authoritarian view of the Bible.

Now that our author has set forth his definitions of revelation and inspiration and their importance to his "incarnational model" of Scripture, one last matter remains. He demonstrates how to find the truly divine (and hence authoritative) aspect in the Scripture. This is discussed under his Casebook-Codebook approaches to Scripture in chapters 7 and 8.

The Casebook-Codebook Approach to Scripture

The casebook-codebook analogy may be seen as a continuation of the author's discussion of his "incarnational model" of the Bible. But a new element is now added. It serves as an interpretational key to understanding the two aspects of the Bible.

Thus far, the author has shown that the Bible has two components, divine ("some kind of special input from" or "intervention by" God) and human (research, experience, human logic, etc). Now he will employ two different terms to describe two different approaches to Scripture.

Codebook Approach. The codebook approach is that which assumes that every thing in Scripture is authoritative. This method "demands *application* more than *interpretation*, obedient *compliance* more than thoughtful *reflection*" (p. 99, his emphasis). This approach will be favored by those who have an "authoritarian" view

of the Bible. The author, however, prefers a second approach—the casebook approach.

Casebook Approach. The casebook approach “describes a series of examples that reflect a variety of responses under varied circumstances” (p. 100). Under this approach, most biblical materials are viewed as case histories. The Bible is said to be silent on many issues and in most cases does not give a clear-cut directive to the reader on what one must do. “Since inspiration opened more than one legitimate alternative to the believers,” readers of the Bible must themselves “choose a course of action without a clear-cut command or a specific revelation from the Lord” (p. 104).

Adopting the casebook approach to the Bible implies that “we are admitting that the Bible lays before us the many differing ways that God has guided His people in the past, but *without making specific decisions for us*” (p. 107). In other words, it is this approach that gives the reader the freedom to choose from the many “different” alternatives.

Does not this casebook approach to the Bible make human reason the final judge—since the individual is the one who decides what to accept or reject? The author speaks to this:

That places a high level of responsibility on the individual human being. It raises the fearful possibility of choosing wrongly and rationalizing away our duty to our own detriment and to the dishonor of God. All that is sobering” (p. 104).

If there is the possibility of choosing wrongly, how can we be assured of knowing the ways of God in Scripture? He answers emphatically: “*We cannot just know Scripture; we have to know God*” (p. 107); This statement appears again: “*We must know God if we are to understand and apply Scripture properly*” (p. 121). But how can we know God without the Scripture? The answer is simple. The Christian must maintain a complex, “three-cornered” relationship between God, His Word and the Christian himself (p. 107).

Who is the highest authority in this hermeneutical trinity (between God, Man and the Bible)? According to our author’s approach; human reason, “in dialogue with the Spirit,” will be the final norm. Reason is the final determiner, the final authority.

The casebook approach allows us—indeed, forces us—to recognize

that revelation and reason must work together. Revelation always deals with specific cases. Reason, in dialogue with the Spirit, determines which of those cases are most helpful in informing the decisions we make day by day (p. 109).

One wonders how "reason, in dialogue with the Spirit" differs from "sanctified" rationalism. The author of *Inspiration* does not address this question. Rather, he proceeds to develop an interpretational key which he claims will make Scripture very plain. He calls this the "Law Pyramid" (chapter 8); it is a pyramid in which "love" is the highest norm. He explains: "A key principle undergirds the concept of the law pyramid: *some of God's laws are more important than others*" (p. 116). When any laws in the Bible seem to clash, appeal to the Ten Commandments; if the Ten Commandments appear to clash, appeal to the Two Commandments to love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40); and if the Two Commands seem to clash, obey the One Commandment of Love (Deut. 6:4-5; Matt. 7:12).

This law pyramid is, according to our author, "the key for defining the unity of Scripture" (p. 261). He writes again, "I am increasingly impressed that the one, the two, and the ten laws provide a remarkably consistent framework within which all of Scripture makes very good sense" (p. 245). The law pyramid is the only thing in Scripture that is "universally authoritative, stable, and enduring. Everything else in Scripture is commentary" (p. 261).

By adopting "love" as the highest norm, our author allows readers of the Bible to use their rational faculties to sort out from the Bible the non-authoritative (non-loving?) elements.

The cases preserved in Scripture (revelation) inform reason and provide the norms by which the Spirit is to be tested. At the same time, however, those cases cannot be understood or applied without reason, nor can the Spirit be tested without reason's sitting in judgment on the evidence (p. 262).

The author rightly recognizes the fact that "human reason is fallible and can be perverse" (p. 261-262). He, therefore, ascribes final authority to *Spirit-enlightened* human reason to decide from Scripture what constitutes the abiding (loving?) elements. Regrettably, our author does not show his readers how one can distinguish between rationalism and enlightened reason. According to him,

"Revelation and reason are not in conflict, for revelation's task is to point to the law of love; reason's task is to describe and understand how each [Bible] writer has done so" (p. 263).

The law pyramid is not only a hermeneutical key, by which our author accepts or rejects any given portion of Scripture, but it is also the basis for his *ethical system*. Despite the disclaimer (see p. 118), the author's hierarchical ethics will ultimately lead to the position of Joseph Fletcher, the father of **situation ethics**, according to which the morality (rightness or wrongness) of any act is decided on the basis of whether the act is a "loving" thing. In this system, "love," the highest norm, is a subjective judgment. Thompson himself seems to realize this when he writes:

Admittedly, what I have outlined is a sophisticated approach to the law, one that requires a rather advanced level of mental and Christian maturity. We would not expect young children or new Christians to be able to function at that level. For that very reason, God has given rules and adaptations—codebook, if you please for those who need them. And the church, as the body of Christ, responsible for believers of every shape and capability, will always have a list of rules to get us started, so to speak (p. 118).

It is noteworthy that the author's casebook approach is only for persons possessing an "advanced level of mental and Christian maturity." Those without this advanced faculty, or who have not yet reached the level of Christian maturity, need the Church to tell them what to do.

When the high level of mental and Christian maturity is attained, then "reason, in dialogue with the Spirit, determines which of those cases are most helpful in informing the decisions we make day by day" (p. 109). This may be what he has in mind when he speaks of "illumination," a term he defines as the "enlightenment given by the Holy Spirit to ordinary people" (p. 57). It is "how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of ordinary mortals" (p. 56).

What then are the controls in interpreting Scripture since all people can claim to be enlightened by the Spirit? What happens if human reason disagrees with the Spirit? Can reason have the upper hand over the Spirit? Among those who claim to be Spirit-enlightened, who is a more authoritative interpreter of Scripture? More specifically, is the Spirit-guided writer of the Bible more qualified

to interpret another inspired writer, than the Spirit-enlightened (but not inspired) human reader? Are the New Testament writers more trustworthy in their interpretation of the Old Testament than a 20th century scholar?

In the author's casebook approach the human readers of the Scriptures are as qualified as the inspired writers (if not more) in their "Spirit-enlightened" interpretation of the Bible. He asserts that the New Testament is not "a final interpreter of the Old Testament" (p. 251). An inspired writer can "drop a hint or suggestion that will open up great windows of light on another passage" (ibid.).

Furthermore, the inspired writer is not necessarily the most competent interpreter. He states:

But because I never take an inspired writer to be a final interpreter of a passage written by another inspired writer, I never have to play one off against the other. In every case I look for the application and the primary thrust of the message (p. 252).

In other words, in the casebook approach to the Bible, the scholar of today is more apostolic than the apostles when it comes to biblical interpretation! This may explain the reason why the author was on one occasion "angry" when he "discovered that Matthew did not follow the same rules that I followed. . . But then I worked it through and discovered that Matthew was using the best methods of his day. So I forgave him" (p. 251). He implies that unless the Bible (or inspired) writers conform to his "rules" of interpretation, they are in error. But if he finds the reason for the error, he can forgive. This may explain why our author "never take[s] an inspired writer to be the final interpreter of a passage written by another inspired writer" (p. 252).

Having described his "more pragmatic, flexible approach to inspiration" (p. 289), and his casebook method of biblical interpretation, the author devotes the remainder of his book (Parts III and IV, pp. 137-264) to illustration and application of his theory of inspiration. In this section he presents some of "the diversity in Scripture, which seems to approach outright contradiction at times" (p. 261). He claims that rightly understood, these problems in the Bible can become stepping-stones for building faith (p. 250).

We shall now direct our attention to an evaluation of the book

we have described. This is in response to Thompson's invitation: "I would hope that this book would help as a guide and as a spur to further study and discussion" (p. 250).

Evaluation of the Proposed Model

There are a number of good things to say about this book. Three come readily to mind. (1) It is an effort to wrestle with some problems of biblical inspiration; (2) it is presented in a simple, easy-to-read format; (3) it attempts to explain some difficulties in the Bible.

Nevertheless, the book has some major demerits. Our evaluation will be directed primarily to these weaknesses of the book. For lack of space, we shall defer comment on the author's claim that he has "followed the debates over inspiration both inside the church and out" (p. 14), as well as his stated purpose to have written "unashamedly for Adventists—for the ultimate purpose of enhancing our outreach and mission to the world" (pp. 19, 20). In our evaluation, we shall look at his model of Scripture, and some of the alleged contradictions found in Scripture.

"Incarnational Model"

One major problem area has to do with the manner in which he has constructed his "incarnational model" of Scripture. We shall look at five specific areas.

Methodology. The major flaw in the whole scheme is exposed by the author's starting point. Why does he seek to develop a theory of inspiration on the basis of "differences" in parallel accounts of the Bible? Why does he not first discover what the Bible says about itself?¹³

The point is, that it is a better methodological procedure to learn about the Scripture's own attestation of its inspiration, and then, subsequently, to attempt to explain the apparent "difficulties." Should we not ask the Bible writers themselves to describe for us how they experienced the phenomena of revelation and inspiration, and on that basis give adequate definitions of these processes? Depending on the approach adopted, a person's investigation will arrive at a certain view of Scripture.¹⁴

If we adopt the approach we are suggesting, it will reveal that

the definitions the author gives for revelation, inspiration, and accommodation are inadequate. They are actually contrary to the claims of Scripture itself. Because our author chooses a different approach in his methodology, he arrives with a view of the Bible in which some of the *content* and *mechanics* of the Bible writers' messages fall to a mere C-/C- pass level on his scale. Should we grade the Bible? If we do, are we not placing ourselves above the Bible?

The Nature of Revelation and Inspiration. How far does God's involvement go in the revelatory and inspirational processes? Is God still actively involved during the research phase, during the reflection phase (as the inspired writer reflects upon nature and experience), and during the communicative phase, so that the final message given by the Bible writer is *fully* trustworthy?

The author suggests that because the Bible is partly the product of its human writers, it is fraught with "a generous sprinkling of 'human imperfections'" (p. 70), some of which seem to approach "outright contradiction at times" (p. 261). But this position contradicts the Bible's own claim that the *sources* of the Bible writers' messages (the "content"), and the manner in which they are communicated (the "mechanics"), do not compromise the absolute trustworthiness of the written Word.

The Bible teaches that, irrespective of the sources of their revelation,¹⁶ when the Bible writers spoke or wrote in God's name, although they employed their own words, logic, rhetoric, etc., their messages were the Word of God, all sufficient and trustworthy (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:16-21).

Consequently, in the NT, words spoken or written by human authors of the OT (such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, etc.) are usually attributed to God (Luke 1:70; Matt. 19:5; Acts 2:16-17; 3:18,; 13:47; 28:25; Rom. 1:2; Heb. 1:1-2, 6-7). Thus, Acts 1:16 says: "The Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David", and Acts 3:21 says, "God spoke by the mouth of his prophets from of old."

The Issue of Biblical Interpretation. The issue of the appropriate *method* of Biblical interpretation is a major question that has divided Christian scholars. It raises the following specific questions: Who is the most qualified person to interpret inspired writings? Is it the twentieth-century scholar or another inspired writer?

Can Seventh-day Adventists use the so-called “scientific” methods applied to biblical interpretation, which are built on non-biblical and naturalistic assumptions?

In the author’s casebook approach to the Bible, human reason is the final norm in determining which sections of Scripture are still authoritative. The author gives the impression that in interpreting a passage from the Scriptures, he is more qualified than any inspired writer. Put differently, the author will accept only the interpretation of inspired writers if their interpretation agrees with his “rules” of interpretation.¹⁶

It is not difficult to recognize that the approach to Scripture adopted in the book under discussion is the historical-critical method, a method that has been rejected by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁷ Therefore, it should not come as a surprise to anyone that for our author the New Testament is not “a final interpreter of the Old Testament” (p. 251).¹⁸

Conservative, Bible-believing scholars reject every form of pagan ideology—even if it is sometimes presented as “scientific”—as the basis of their understanding of Scriptures.¹⁹ These human “rules” of interpretation cannot be harmonized with the unique claims of the Bible. To use such methodologies implies that the scholar is more apostolic than the apostles.

The Question of Divine Accommodation. Does divine accommodation require God to adapt Himself to popular opinion, past or present—even opinions that are in error? In other words, does God ever make an incidental affirmation, in Scripture, of a “fact” that was untrue? Our author seems to think so.²⁰ His view is not only contrary to Scriptural testimony, it also raises many theological questions:

1. If God intentionally made incidental affirmations of falsehood in order to present greater truths, then God is guilty of telling “white lies.” But the Bible teaches that “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18). God “never lies” in the Scriptures (Titus 1:2). “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17; cf. 10:35).

2. It also denies the Bible writers’ unanimous affirmation in the absolute truthfulness of every statement in Scripture—not some, or most (Ps. 12:6; 18:30; 119:96; Prov. 30:5; Matt. 22:44-45; Luke 24:25; Acts 3:18; 24:14; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; etc.).

3. If such a view of divine accommodation is valid, it will be contrary to Jesus' plain claim that "He who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from Him" (John 8:26, 38). It is also contrary to the practice of Jesus, who refused to accommodate Himself to the mistaken views current in his day.²¹

Dichotomy between Saving Acts and Factual Statements.

Can we make a distinction between theological statements of God's saving acts and their accompanying historical descriptions? Is there a dichotomy between true doctrine and true science? For example, can we separate the theology of creation (the "who" of creation) from the scientific issues (the "how," the "how long" and the "when" of creation)? Can we separate the miracles of the Exodus from the actual number of people who left Egypt, and the biblical dating of that event? On what basis do we accept one and not the other?

Our author argues that we can accept the Exodus miracle, but that the *exact* "number of people involved in the Exodus is not that crucial" (p. 222).²² He maintains that there was a miraculous flood in Noah's day, but believes that the biblical flood was "less than [a] *universal* event," and he intimates that we can accept the historicity of Moses, but entertain "the possibility that Amram and Jochebed were Moses' ancestors, but not his parents" (pp. 222, 247).

In effect, our author is suggesting that in Scriptural accounts, there are some things that are "essential" and others that are "debatable" (p. 248). But this position is also at variance with the testimony of the Scriptures.

Bible writers make no such distinction between saving acts and the historicity of the details. Some 400-500 years after the events of Moses' time and Joshua's conquest of Canaan there is a reaffirmation of their historicity by later Old Testament writers (see for example, Ps. 105; 106; Isa. 28:21; 1 Kings 16:34).

New Testament writers, over a thousand years after the events of the Old Testament, trusted even the smallest details in the Old Testament narratives. They wrote about detailed aspects in the OT with regard to Abraham, Rebekah, the history of Israel (Acts 13:17-23; Rom. 4:10, 19; 9:10-12; 1 Cor. 10:1-11), the detailed description of the Old Testament sanctuary (Heb. 9:1-5, 19-21), the manner of creation (Heb. 11:3), the particulars of the lives of Abel, Enoch,

Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, etc. (Heb. 11; 7:2; James 2:25), Esau (Heb. 12:16-17), the saving of eight persons during a universal flood (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:5, 6), the speaking of Balaam's donkey (2 Pet. 2:16), etc.

Jesus, our Example, accepted the full trustworthiness of the OT accounts and made no distinction between history and theology. For example, He believed in the historicity of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's universal flood, and Jonah's story (Matt. 19:4, 5; 23:35; 24:38, 39; 12:40).

On the basis of the Scriptures, Bible-believing scholars make no dichotomy between so-called "essential" and "debatable" aspects of Old Testament saving acts. They do not claim to be more Christlike than Christ in their use of Scripture. Like their Saviour, they accept every historical detail—chronology, numbers, events and people—as a matter of faith and practice. This does not make them blind to copyist and translator errors, but these are generally seen for what they are when the Bible is studied as a whole on any of its subjects.

What we have attempted to show above is that the author's view of Scripture has various major implications. The questions that have been raised so far are designed to show that this model of Scripture is inadequate on two major grounds: (1) his inductive methodology does not do justice to Scripture's self-attestation, and (2) his "incarnational model" Scripture is more sociological than biblical.

One can rightly conclude that our author's use of the term "incarnational" to describe the Bible, just as his use of the word "differences" to mean "inconsistencies," or "contradictions," is misleading. The casual reader of his book may not easily discern that he has loaded these expressions with new meanings.

Alleged "Contradictions"

The author's alleged "inconsistencies" in Scripture are either misunderstandings of the text or the result of wrong assumptions. If we are correct, then the effort he has made in constructing a theory of inspiration on such so-called "differences" is misdirected.²³

Admittedly, we are not able in limited space and extent of

knowledge to deal individually with all the questions raised by the critics. But at least we can attempt to show that there are alternative approaches to these alleged contradictions. Many of the problems raised by our present author have already been responded to by conservative scholars in their works.²⁴ I will, therefore, limit our discussion to a few notable ones touched on in his book.

OT Parallel Passage: David's Census (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 21). Our author writes that "the account of David's census serves as an example of the kinds of challenges posed by parallel biblical passages" (p. 174). Thompson raises four questions in these two accounts:

(1) Who ordered the census? **God** (2 Sam.) or **Satan** (1 Chron.)?

(2) Total persons numbered? **1,300,000** (2 Sam) or **1,570,000** (1 Chron.)?

(3) Whose threshing floor? **Araunah** (2 Sam.) or **Ornan** (1 Chron.)?

(4) Amount of shekels paid? **50 shekels of silver** (2 Sam) or **600 shekels of gold** (1 Chron.)?

Without adopting the author's evolutionary development of the origin of Satan in the OT (pp. 176-182), or his attempt to trivialize the importance of biblical details, we can offer some explanations for the seemingly inconsistent accounts.

(1) The "who" of the census can be explained by referring to God's permissive will in the affairs of the world. Examples can be multiplied in the Bible; God's permission to Satan to afflict Job, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, the choice of Saul as king of Israel, etc.

In the parallel accounts in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, David was responsible in the sense that he *chose* to displease God by having the census—even against the objections of Joab; he later confessed his sin (2 Sam. 24:10, 17; cf. 1 Chron. 21:8, 17). Satan, the adversary of God and His people, was responsible in the sense that he was the one who *incited* David. God was responsible in the sense that He permitted Satan to incite David.

(2) How many people were numbered? A casual reading of the two parallel passages will reveal some apparent inconsistencies. The account in 2 Samuel records that there were 800,000 in Israel

and 500,000 in Judah (totaling **1,300,000**); the passage in 1 Chronicle gives 1,100,000 in “all Israel,” and 470,000 in Judah (totaling **1,570,000**). Besides the total numbers that are different, a comparison of the respective figures for Israel and Judah are also different. How do we account for these? The Bible must be its own key in interpreting itself.

The Bible makes it clear that (i) this census that took Joab 10 months to conduct was *not complete*, apparently because of the plagues that had set in (1 Chron. 27:24). (ii) We are also told that he did not number the tribes of Levi and Benjamin (1 Chron 21:6). (iii) The figure of Chronicles with 1,100,000 for “all Israel” is larger than Samuel’s 800,000, apparently because it does not include the 288,000 strongstanding army of David (1 Chron 27:1-15). Note that there is no “all” before “Israel” in Samuel’s account. If the 288,000 is added to the 1,300,000 total of Samuel’s account, the total will be **1,588,000**, against Chronicle’s **1,570,000**. It is a matter of interest to note that the Chronicles’ total is the smaller. It is this same book which says that Joab did not complete the census.

We wish to make one point: We cannot ascribe “inconsistency” or “error” to the two accounts. Indicators in the texts as well as the explicit statement of the Bible itself maintain that the numbers given are not complete.

(3) At whose threshing floor was the angel of the Lord? The names given in the two parallel accounts—“Araunah the Jebusite” and “Ornan the Jebusite”—may refer to the same person. First, in the Bible, persons sometimes possess two different names (such as Abram/Abraham, Jacob/Israel, Jethro/Reuel, Simeon/Peter, Saul/Paul). Second, we need not be surprised that **Araunah** could be the same as **Ornan**. It should be remembered that the original Hebrew alphabet consisted of consonants only. Thus, the *root* letters for the name Araunah appear to have been *ʾrn* and those for Ornan likewise *ʾrn*. The differences in vocalization may be due simply to the varying pronunciations of the Jebusite’s name at the time when the accounts were recorded. The point is that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that these two apparently different names are linguistically related and derive from the same root.

(4) How much did David pay? The two parallel accounts provide us with an answer. In 2 Samuel 24:24, we are told: “So David

bought the *threshing floor* and the *oxen* for 50 *shekels of silver*." In 1 Chronicles 21:15, "So David paid Ornan 600 *shekels gold* by weight for the *site*." Are there any inconsistencies? It does not look like it. The Chronicles account tells of the cost of the *site*; this might be the entire site of which the *threshing floor* was only a part. If this is the case, we can understand why the *site* cost 600 shekels of gold and the *threshing floor* only 50 shekels of silver. We do not, therefore, need to ascribe inconsistency to the two accounts.

NT Parallel Passage: The Inscription on the Cross. This is one of the examples cited as an "incidental difference" or "significant difference" (p. 194) in the gospel accounts. How do we explain the apparently contradictory wording of the inscription on the cross?

Matthew 27:37: **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS**

Mark 15:26: **THE KING OF THE JEWS**

Luke 23:38: **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS**

John 19:19: **JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**

The explanation is not too difficult to find when we let the Bible speak for itself. Various kinds of explanations are possible. I would suggest one. According to John, the notice was written in three languages—Hebrew, Greek and Latin (John 19:20). There is no indication in the gospels to suggest that the wording was the same in all three languages. It is also very likely that one writer was giving us an exact copy of the Greek inscription while the others are providing us with translations of the Hebrew inscription, or the Latin version, or even, perhaps a mixture of them both. This may shed some light on the alleged contradictions in the accounts of the gospel writers regarding the inscription on the cross.²⁶

The Problem of Large Numbers in the OT (the Exodus Statistics). Probably this is the author's major item among his "minor rational difficulties" (p. 221). He devotes a whole chapter to it.²⁶

The Bible states that those who left Egypt in the Exodus were 600,000 men, besides women and children (Exod. 12:37). Adding children and women will yield a figure close to 2 million. In the course of the Israelite's journey, other censuses were taken that place their number in the same range.²⁷

Traditionally, critical scholars have questioned the accuracy of

the 2 million number on the grounds that it would have been impossible for such a large number of people to leave Egypt in a single night, be sustained logistically in the barren desert, cross the Jordan in a day, march around the small 10-acre city of Jericho, etc. Consequently, they have come up with all kinds of approaches to reduce this large number of people in the Exodus. Some have explained the large numbers recorded in the Bible as due to "corruptions" in the text, such as transmission errors, even though the present text has no evidence of such. Others have suggested that the numbers are symbolic, or even the population of a later period.²⁸

Our author adds his voice to the popular doubt by suggesting that the word, *'eleph*, translated "thousand" should be translated by its other meanings:²⁹ **family division** (Num. 31:5; Josh. 22:14); **clan** (1 Sam. 23:23; Micah 5:2), **captain** (Jer. 13:21); or even **ruler** (as in Matt. 2:6, quoting Micah 5:2). In this way the 600,000 men will mean 600 clans, or 600 captains or rulers—an explanation that makes the Exodus numbers seem more reasonable to "analytical" minds.³⁰

In the first place, when the Bible employs *'eleph* as a number ("thousand"), it is often associated with *me'oth*, the word for "hundreds" as the next lower unit. For example, in Numbers 1:21, the number of males in the tribe of Reuben is cited literally as "six and forty thousand (*e'leph*) and five hundreds (*me'oth*)" [46,500]. In this case, it would be impossible for *'eleph* to mean "clans" or "family divisions" and 500 men! What happens to the translation of *me'oth*, the word for "hundreds"? In Exodus 12:37 *me'oth* ("hundreds" is in close association with *'eleph* ("thousand").

Secondly, the Bible itself (Exod. 38:25-28) states that the total amount of money collected from the half-shekel tax was 100 talents and 1,775 shekels, or a total of 301,775 shekels. This works out as the exact amount of money that would have been obtained from the 603,550 men who were each taxed half-shekel; in other words, $1/2 \times 603,550 = 301,775$! This close matching of men and money ("about six hundred thousand men," Exod. 12:37) is possible only if *'eleph* is understood as "thousand"—not "clan."

Thirdly, a comparison of the figures given for the first and second census recorded in the book of Numbers (Num. 1:19-46; 26:1-51) show that Moses understood *'eleph* to be "thousand"—not

"clans" or "divisions." Let us look at how the Bible computes the numbers of the various tribes:

Tribe	First Census	Second Census
Reuben	46,500	43,730
Simeon	59,300	22,200
Gad	45,650	40,500
Judah	74,600	76,500
Issachar	54,400	64,300
Zebulum	57,400	60,500
Ephraim	40,500	32,500
Mannasseh	32,200	52,700
Benjamin	35,400	45,600
Dan	62,700	64,400
Asher	41,500	53,400
Naphtali	53,400	45,400
TOTAL	603,550	601,730

Now, if we follow the suggestion of the author and say that instead of counting the number of Reuben in the first census as 46,500, we should rather understand the *'elep* as 46 "clans" and of 550 men, we shall run into some major problems. It would mean that, for the first census, if we add all the "clans" (assuming that we translate *'elep* as "clans" and not "thousands"), of the twelve tribes listed (that is, 46+59+45+74+54+57+40+32+35+62+41+53), we should get **603** *'elep* or "clans" (the total the Bible itself gives in Num. 2:32). Instead, we get **598** *'elep*s. Something must be wrong with this approach. Similarly, the second census figures, by the suggestion of the critics, will yield only the **596** instead of the expected **601** (Num. 26:51). The problem is further compounded if we attempt to add the figures in the *me'oth* or "hundreds" columns.

The point we are making is simple: The Bible states that the number of people during the Exodus was approximately 600,000 males (2 million persons, allowing for women and children). There is no reason to ignore the biblical figures just because our "rational minds" have difficulty accepting the explicit, unambiguous claims of the Bible.

Our conclusion, on the basis of the Bible's own internal keys

(the sum raised from the tabernacle tax, and the computation of the census figures) is that the word *e'leph* should be translated as "thousands" and not "clans" or "family divisions." Hence the figure of 600,000+ males (or a total of about 2 million people, women and children included) was the actual number of people involved in the Exodus.

Other "Minor Rational Difficulties." Our author also cites some other "minor rational difficulties that arise if we adopt the figure of 2 million as representing the number of Israelites leaving Egypt" (p. 221). He has three "modest rational problems" (p. 222) with the following passages: Deut. 7, Exod. 1, and Num. 3. Using these biblical texts he attempts to show that the Exodus figures may "have been distorted" (*ibid*). We shall briefly look at these problems.

(1) *Deuteronomy 7*. In this chapter Israel is described as "fewest of all peoples" (7:7) among seven nations "greater and mightier than thou." The question is asked, how can 2 million people be described as "fewest of all peoples?" The author suggests the "possibility that the numbers cited in the Old Testament have been distorted" (p. 222). How will the conservative Bible-believing student respond?

Apart from the fact that we do not know the numbers of the other nations with which to compare the 2 million Israelites, the context clearly has to do with the *ability of ordinary untrained, unequipped, ex-slaves, to fight* (7:1, 17). It is, therefore, understandable that Israel is described as "fewest of all peoples." Second, the Bible itself states that despite their fewness in number, "Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many; Moab was overcome with fear of Israel" (Num. 22:3).

The fear of the Moabites is further confirmed by the fact that, at the time of the Exodus, "the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exod. 1:7). Their sheer number was the cause of the Pharaoh's fear; and his later decree to have the male children destroyed; he said to his people: "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and . . . join also unto our enemies, and fight against us" (Exod. 1:9, 10).

We can only conclude that in Deuteronomy 7, Israel's number was "few among all the peoples" in the sense of military prowess, but large—"millions" (as Ellen G. White maintains in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 410)—with respect to their actual number.

(2) *Exodus 1:15-22*. This passage mentions two midwives, practicing their skills at the time of Moses. Our author asks: "How large a population could only two midwives serve? Eighty years later, would one have expected a population of 2 million? Not likely" (p. 222).

Conservative scholars have no problem with this text either. In the first place, the Bible does not say there were only two midwives; it only mentions the names of two. Two midwives would certainly have been too few to deliver all the babies in Egypt; how then can we explain the fact that only two are singled out for mention? (i) These could have been representatives or heads of the profession; (ii) they could have been the only two midwives to disobey Pharaoh; or (iii) they could have been the only two whose names were remembered because of their unusual kindness to the Israelites. The Bible does not say anything beyond that.

Second, the Bible does not say that the midwives helped *all* mothers in their delivery; there may well have been many mothers who delivered their babies without any midwife assistance.

Third, the Bible does not say that the midwives were the only midwives during the entire 80 years. It only mentions the names of two [head?] midwives *at the time the decree of Pharaoh was made*. There could have been many more midwives *after* the decree.

Bearing the above points in mind, let us do a little calculation to see how many babies could be delivered by only two nurses. Assuming that each of them delivered 5 single babies per day (no multiple births) for 300 days in a year there will be a total of 3,000 babies delivered in one year. For 80 years (the time between Moses' birth and the *Exodus*), they could have delivered 240,000 babies! Thus 20 midwives (assuming there were many more midwives), delivering 5 babies a day could have easily raised a population of 2 million.

(3) *Numbers 3:43*. Numbers 3 describes some of the unique functions of Levites, one of which was to substitute for all the firstborn in Israel. Earlier in the book of *Exodus*, God had claimed

all firstborn sons and animals as His (Exod. 13:2). The animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord. But since the firstborn of the non-priestly tribes could not be sacrificed, a Levite was to substitute for the firstborn son upon the payment of a redemption fee. The census in Numbers 3 was designed to reveal the exact number of firstborn sons to be redeemed by the Levites. The census shows that there were 22,273 *firstborn* males from 1 month old and upward among the 600,000+ males (Num. 3:43).

How does our author use these two figures: the 22,273 firstborn and 600,000 males? He simply divides the 600,000 males who left Egypt by the 22,273 firstborn, yielding approximately 27 adult males per family (and allowing for all 2 million people, there would be about 80 children per family). Eighty children per family? Impossible, according to the author. And it is impossible, if his assumptions are correct. But his assumptions may not be as strong as he leads us to believe.

Our author's calculations are based on one wrong assumption: the firstborn sons who were sanctified (22,273, according to Num. 3) include all firstborn sons who *left* Egypt, and not only those who were *born* during the 13 months from Egypt to the time of this census (Num. 1:1). In other words, he is suggesting that the 22,273 number is *retroactive*, that is to say, it includes firstborn fathers, grandfathers, and even great-grandfathers at that time. But this assumption is contradicted by the text itself, and other portions of Scripture.

The Bible teaches that at the time of the institution of the Passover, God had already sanctified all the firstborn to Himself (Exod. 13:2). God also instructed that at a later time when Israel should enter Canaan, an additional sanctification of firstborn was to take place (Exod. 13:11-13). This fact is further indicated by Numbers 3:13 and 8:17, which state that, "All the firstborn are Mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto Me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast."

It is clear, therefore, that the 22,273 firstborn sons who were substituted for the Levites (Num. 3:45-51), were those who were born during the first thirteen months after the Exodus. The real question then is this: Is it possible for 600,000 married couples to

give birth to 22,273 boys in 13 months? Why not? Of the 600,000 couples, we only have to assume that 50,000 (1/12 the population) of them were each going to have children for the first time. If half the children born to these new parents were males, that could easily give 25,000 firstborn.

What I have attempted to show in this section is that the author's alleged "inconsistences" in Scripture are either misunderstandings of the text or the result of wrong assumptions. If indeed, they are, the effort that has been made in *Inspiration* to construct a theory of inspiration on such so-called "differences" is misdirected.

The responses I have given to some of the "difficult" passages are not intended to be the final word on the questions; what I have sought to do is only to suggest that there are other ways of looking at the problems. Whatever solutions may be offered to any biblical issue, the Bible should remain the final authority. Hopefully, this exercise will convince us to suspend judgment on declaring difficult passages of Scripture to be "contradictions" or even "errors." The Bible should always reprove and correct us, not the other way around (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Conclusion

One of our author's stated purposes for writing his book was to present his particular "incarnational model" of Scripture as "a welcome common ground" between liberals and conservatives in the Church (p. 143). It was a laudable effort. Did he succeed?

The gulf between theological liberalism and Bible-believing scholars cannot be bridged by any amount of compromises since these two groups differ radically in their views on biblical inspiration and interpretation. Unlike those conservative Bible-believing scholars who affirm that God's verbal propositional revelation comes to us as inspired authoritative Scripture, the distinctive feature of liberalism is:

A view of the Bible as a fallible human record of religious thought and experience rather than a divine revelation of truth and reality; doubts, more or less extensive, about the historical facts on which Bible writers base Christianity; insistence that the churches should be undogmatic in temper, tolerating a plurality of theologies, and

seeing personal and social ethics as their main concern; and a belief that seeking society's renewal rather than evangelizing individuals is the primary Christian task.³¹

Contrary to the above liberal position, I have maintained that Bible-believing Adventists accept the divinely inspired Bible in its entirety as absolutely trustworthy and dependable. This is how Jesus Himself viewed the Bible. His repeated assertion, "It is written," testifies to this fact. If we are true followers of the Saviour, we must begin by submitting to the Bible's unquestioned authority.

I have also argued, contrary to the practice of historical-critical theologians, that conservative, Bible-believing Adventists accept the inspired writers of the Bible as more authoritative for the interpretation of Scripture than any uninspired modern scholar. Since all inspired writers have been uniquely qualified by the Holy Spirit to present their messages, there is no contradiction in the writings of the Bible writers. Conservatives therefore have no difficulty in accepting one inspired writer to be a final interpreter of a passage produced by another inspired writer. If we truly recognize the Bible writers as inspired, we cannot present ourselves as more apostolic than the apostles themselves in the interpretation of Scriptures.

Finally, I asserted that whenever Christians encounter difficulties in the Bible, they should not hastily declare these difficulties as "contradictions," "inconsistencies," "inaccuracies," or "errors." Instead they should withhold judgement, and prayerfully study the Bible until the Lord deems fit to shed more light on these questions.³²

I would now like to make a personal statement regarding the book, *Inspiration*. Let me begin with some concerns.

1. As a published work *Inspiration* has the potential for shaking or undermining the faith of untrained believers who may not be aware of biblically viable alternatives to the issues raised by the author. The simple, easy-to-read format of the book, as well as the "conservative" posture assumed by the author, can predispose readers to accept everything in the book as biblical or even Adventist.

2. The model of Scripture presented by the author has implications for Adventists on the authority of Ellen G. White. In our

author's theory, "Inspiration as a phenomenon is the same in the experience of the Bible writers as it is in the experience of Ellen White" (p. 252). Pressed to its logical conclusion, his suggested model of inspiration and his casebook approach to Scriptures, if applied to Ellen G. White, will seriously undermine the authority of these writings even as they do the Scriptures.

3. *Inspiration* carries within it the possibility of creating further polarization or division in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Those who do not agree with his "incarnational model" of Scripture can be easily labelled as individuals with "authoritarian" tendencies (pp.90-97). For a church that seeks its unity on the basis of the Bible rather than culture, his sociological interpretations present significant problems.

4. Finally our author's favorable attitude towards descriptive aspects of the historical-critical method (pp. 271-272) raises a major ecclesiological question. The approved Annual Council document, "Method of Bible Study Committee (GCC-A)—Report" states clearly that: "Even a modified use of this [historical-critical] method . . . is unacceptable to Adventists."³³ Now, is it appropriate for Adventist scholars and a major publishing house to ignore this directive? This question raises the crucial problem of pluralism in Seventh-day Adventist theology leading to congregationalism in Seventh-day Adventist church polity.

In the light of the above concerns, it should not be unexpected if a reader of *Inspiration* would disagree with both the position espoused in the book, as well as the author's claim that:

To a large extent, this book simply describes the approach to Christian living that Adventists have always practiced but simply have been reluctant to admit in print. If anything is unusual, then, it is the candor with which the 'illustrations' are laid (p. 143).

Nonetheless, the author's work can be turned to serve several purposes. First, it can challenge the Church to discuss more extensively the biblical foundations upon which its doctrine and practices are based. Secondly, it can reveal why Adventist Bible teachers are divided into liberal and conservative camps, namely, they have different views on the authority of the Bible and hence Ellen G. White. Thirdly, it can serve as an additional challenge for conserva-

tive Bible-believing Adventists to develop further constructive alternatives to theological issues facing the church.

Probably, the most encouraging thing about the book is that *Inspiration* is presented as a "suggestion" with the assumption: "If our position on inspiration needs revision, let us set about revising it" (p. 145). While we constantly deepen and strengthen our position on revelation and inspiration, let us remember a crucial statement by Ellen G. White as we engage in this task:

God will have a *people upon the earth* to maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of *all reforms*. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—*not one nor all of these* should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "*Thus saith the Lord*" in its support. (*Great Controversy*, p. 595, emphasis supplied).

Endnotes

1 Dr. Thompson has served a number of years as an administrator and is currently professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington. He is a columnist for the denomination's monthly outreach magazine, *Signs of the Times*, and a contributor to the *Adventist Review*. Because of his influence, the impact of his book will be felt in administrative circles where he interacts with other church leaders, in the religion classroom where he teaches students, and in his printed pages for Adventists and non-Adventists alike.

2 Thompson also suggests that the views he has expressed in his book are shared by many Adventists: "To a large extent, this book simply describes the approach to Christian living that Adventists have always practiced but simply have been reluctant to admit in print. If anything is unusual, then, it is the candor with which the 'illustrations' are laid" (p. 143).

3 I will begin my discussion of this work by stating the two assumptions I hold, with respect to the Bible: (1) the Bible, consisting of the 66 books of the OT and NT, is the divinely inspired word of God; as such, the Bible alone should be the basis of all doctrines, and the standard in correcting any theological position (2 Tim. 3:15-17); (2) all the claims that the Bible makes on any subject— theology, history, science, chronology, numbers, etc.—are absolutely trustworthy and dependable (2 Pet. 1:16-21).

4 Our author recognizes that "discussions touching on the inspiration of Scripture have proven to be as volatile and divisive as any throughout the history of Christianity" (p. 145) and claims to have "followed the debates over inspiration both inside the church and out" (p. 14). However, the bibliography and particularly the content of the book itself do not reflect any up to date discussions on the

issue of inspiration and hermeneutics. With the large amount of works published in this area in the past decade, one would have expected these to surface in his book. If the author had done so, he would have realized that his proposal is at variance with the theological position of contemporary, Bible-believing conservative scholars.

5 Two extremes in Christian theology on the question of the Bible's inspiration are seen (pp. 87, 88, 94): (1) The staunch conservative view ("Fundamentalist"), which apparently holds to a mechanical dictation theory, in which the divine aspect of Scripture is emphasized and (2) the theological liberal ("Radical Critic") position which apparently upholds a subjective encounter theory, in which the human aspect of Scripture is emphasized.

6 He is tempted to pronounce "a woe" on anyone who attempts to read Part III without first reading Part II (p. 139). This theoretical section (Part II) is so important that he suggests to his readers to study Part II again if they find problems with Part III (pp. 139, 145, 146).

7 In fact, the author admits that "the illustrations ['differences' or 'difficulties'] found in Part III [of his book] have led me to the suggestions [the theory of revelation and inspiration] developed in Part II [of his book]" (p. 145).

8 Again, the author states: "God **inspires** the messenger to share orally or in writing, and to augment **revelation** with research when appropriate" (p. 61). He also writes: "Inspired writers with a message to share do not hesitate to augment revelation with research. Whether from archives, libraries, personal letters, or elsewhere, they make use of the writings of others to help get their point across" (p. 157). It would appear from his view of revelation that both research and experience will be subordinate to "revelation."

9 Liberals hold that, in divine accommodation God accommodates Himself to popular opinion—even if those opinions are wrong—for the sake of effectively communicating His message to people whose knowledge of or ability to grasp those truths was limited. Bible-believers however, employ the term "accommodation" as a designation of "that characteristic of biblical literature which allows a writer, for purposes of simplification, to adjust his language to the limitations of his readers *without compromising the truth in the process*." See W. Broomal, "Accommodation," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), p. 9 (emphasis mine).

10 In this regard, our author's view of "accommodation" is closer to the position of theological liberals than Bible-believing conservative Christians.

11 It must be understood however, that whenever our author talks about the "imperfections" "difficulties," "problems," etc., of the Bible, he has in mind the "errors," "mistakes," "inconsistencies" and "contradictions" inherent in the biblical text. In Part III of his book (p. 147-236), he will give examples of "many 'human' features of the Bible put to skillful use by God in communicating His will to the human family" (ibid.).

12 Some questions that need to be asked in connection with his incarnational analogy of the Bible are the following: a) Is there ever a time when we can separate the humanity of Jesus from his divinity? Can we separate the human dimensions of Scriptures from the divine (as he seems to do in his casebook-codebook approach)? b) Were there "imperfections" in Jesus because of His humanity (theologically speaking, did Jesus ever sin)? c) Point (b) above deals with the *content* of Scripture. What about the *language* (the mechanics by which the Scripture is presented)? Arguing on the analogy between (i) the humanity and divinity of Jesus

and (ii) the Bible, are we justified in saying that because of the frailties of humanity, Jesus did not adequately reveal the Father through His incarnation? When applied to the Bible, is human language, despite its limitations, adequate to transmit in a trustworthy manner the content of divine revelation? Refer to Frank M. Hasel's "Reflections on the Authority and Trustworthiness of Scripture" in this issue of *ATS Occasional Papers*.

13 Do we judge people by their first appearance or should we judge them after we learn from them facts about where they are coming from and why they appear the way they do? As we indicated earlier in our analysis, the strength of our author's approach is equivalent to that of a person who attempts to build a doctrine of the Sabbath on Colossians 2:16, or a doctrine of the state of the dead on the parable by Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 19)!

14 For an example of one scholar who has operated differently from Thompson, see Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating A Doctrine of Scripture," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 19-59.

15 There are many different methods of revelation besides dreams and visions; e. g., direct [theophanic] revelation (Exod. 3:1-4:23; 20; 1 Kings 19:9-18; Rev. 1:11-3:22), historical research (1 Kings 11:41; 1 Chron. 29:29; Luke 1:1-4), memory (John 14:26), and the use of the Bible writers own judgment (1 Cor. 7:12). All these are consistent with God's ways, since He Himself can choose to lead the inspired writers to discover the truths He has already revealed in nature, history and human experience (Ps. 19; Rom. 1 & 2; Heb. 1:1-2).

16 He states: "But because I never take an inspired writer to be a final interpreter of a passage written by another inspired writer, I never have to play one off against the other. In every case I look for the application and the primary thrust of the message" (p. 252).

17 In the January 22, 1987, issue of the *Adventist Review*, 18-19, the General Conference approved the "Method of Bible Study Committee (GCC-A)—Report," in which the use of the historical critical methodology of biblical interpretation is rightly rejected. Part of the report reads: "Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists" (p. 18).

18 In chapter 18 of *Inspiration*, the author discusses "difficulties that arise when we attempt to allow one inspired writer to be a final interpreter of a passage produced by another inspired writer" (p. 286). Thompson explains that on one occasion he was "angry" when he "discovered that Matthew did not follow the same rules that I followed. . . But then I worked it through and discovered that Matthew was using the best methods of his day. So I forgave him" (p. 251).

19 For an excellent, easy-to-understand discussion of the practice and shortcomings of the modern "scientific" method of biblical interpretation, see Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 7-48, 72-159.

20 He argues that even though God was aware of the truth of certain minor historical, scientific, geographical, etc. facts, (a) for the sake of the people at that time whose knowledge of those truths was limited, and (b) for the sake of effectively communicating His ethical and theological teachings to them, He deliberately accommodated His message to the needs of the people (see my analysis of his view of "accommodation").

21 Jesus' statements, "You have heard that it was said of old. . . But I say

unto you" (Matt. 5; cf. John 8:24, 44), are illustrative of this fact. For this reason, Jesus took contrary positions on divorce, oath-taking, and traditions regarding food (Matt. 19:9; 23:16-22; 15:11-20). If Jesus, the Incarnate Word, deliberately accommodated Himself to mistaken views of His day, He was a liar and therefore a sinner. But the Bible says, "He committed no sin and no guile was found in Him" (1 Pet. 2:22).

22 Our author writes: "An incarnational model allows for human imperfections in the lesser matters, arguing for example, that the *fact* of the Exodus is clear, but that the *number* which went out certainly not" (p. 302).

23 As we have shown in our analysis, *Inspiration* is built on an *a priori* assumption that the difficulties met in the Scriptures (the author prefers the term, "differences") are "contradictions" or "errors" (see my analysis of his methodology and his understanding of "divine accommodation"). In other words, if it can be shown that his "minor rational difficulties" (p. 221) are really a misunderstanding of the text, he may consider revising his own position on inspiration as he himself has suggested on page 145: "If our position on inspiration needs revision, let us set about revising it."

24 Notable examples include John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Pittsburgh, PA: Whitaker House, [1887?]); Gleason L. Archer, "Alleged Errors and Discrepancies in the Original Manuscripts of the Bible," in Norman Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 57-82; See also Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

25 There is another factor that needs to be considered in dealing with this issue, namely, the use of literary devices in the Bible. It should be remembered that there were no punctuation marks in Bible times—no quotation marks, brackets, commas, etc. This can create problems for the modern reader who seeks to judge the Bible writers by our modern literary standards. Let us illustrate this with an example:

1. *Direct Quotation*: Pilate's inscription read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

2. *Indirect Quotation*: Pilate has written that Jesus was the King of the Jews.

It must be clear to the reader that even though the two sentences above are "quotations" of Pilate, the use of quotation marks and a colon in the first example make it easier for us to know the extent of Pilate's exact words, than in the second example—even though both sentences convey the message of Pilate that was inscribed on the cross.

26 A discussion of the number of people involved in the exodus has implications for ascertaining who the parents of Moses were [Thompson "guesstimates" that Amram and Jochebed could not have been the parents of Moses]; it also has implications for the dating of the exodus, for reckoning biblical genealogies, and possibly, for calculating the age of the earth.

27 The first census, involving all the people over 20 years, was commanded by God for the purpose of taxing them half a shekel each for the building of the tabernacle (Exo 30:11-16; 38:25f). The number then was 603,550. The same number was obtained in a second census (Num. 1:1-54) some nine months after the first census; in this second instance the purpose was to determine the number of people eligible for war. There was a third census, totaling 601,730 (Num. 26:51) taken nearly forty years later, for the purpose of distributing the land of Canaan. What is clear is that the number of people from the time of their departure from

Egypt to the time of their arrival in the promised land was over 600,000 males (or about 2 million in all) (cf. Num. 2:32; 11:21).

28 Bible-believing Christians have argued against the liberal effort to reduce the figure by insisting that, even a small figure of 20,000 would easily have perished from hunger and thirst in that wilderness just as quickly as 600,000 men. Conservatives therefore ask: Why do we have to believe in a "miracle" with a reduced number and not exercise the same faith in a "miracle" with a large number just as the Bible says?

29 This seems to be the author's position when he writes:

"We cannot prove the point, of course, but the remarkable ambiguity possible with the Hebrew word for thousand may very well lie behind some of the huge numbers in the Old Testament, numbers that seem much too large to us. We may still have monumental miracles without insisting on quite so many people. The evidence from Scripture suggests that we should allow for that kind of flexibility in Scripture" (p. 223).

30 According to Thompson, "The evidence from Scripture" allows for the "kind of flexibility in Scripture" he wants for large numbers (p. 223). Does "the evidence from Scripture" really allow for that kind of flexibility? A careful study of the Bible reveals that when it comes to the three censuses of the Exodus, there are no "ambiguities" in translating the *'elep* as "thousand."

31 See article on "Liberalism and Conservatism in Theology," in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), pp. 384-385.

32 Through the painstaking study of Bible-believing scholars, God has shed some light on some of the Bible difficulties that had, in the past, masqueraded as "errors." See, for example, the work of Seventh-day Adventist scholars such as Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977); Siegfried H. Horn, *The Spade Confirms the Book* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1980); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); idem., *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980).

33 See *Adventist Review* (January 22, 1987), p. 18.

AN EVALUATION OF ALDEN THOMPSON'S "INCARNATIONAL" METHOD IN THE LIGHT OF HIS VIEW OF SCRIPTURE AND USE OF ELLEN WHITE

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Alden Thompson claims to represent Ellen White's understanding of Scripture, particularly that presented in her two basic documents on the incarnational model in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 15-23 and *The Great Controversy*, pp. v-xii. Thompson reprints these documents as part one of his book.¹ His views on these documents form the basis of his thesis.

In order to keep this evaluation simple, I will give you my conclusions first, and then present the evidence: (1) In coming to these two documents of Ellen White, Thompson does not take them at face value, allowing them to inform his thesis. Rather he reads into them his own ideas, which often are contrary to what the documents actually say. In other words, while giving lip service to them as fundamental to his thesis, he spells out a position that contradicts the very message contained in these Ellen White documents.² (2) Repeatedly throughout his book, Thompson makes reference, directly or indirectly, to Ellen White. Yet nowhere does he make a presentation of what Ellen White really says about

Scripture beyond the two documents that he wrongly interprets as being basic to his thesis. Yet a careful study of her many references to Scripture reveal that her view of Scripture is radically different from Thompson's view—even though he claims to represent hers. (3) Thompson's approach to Scripture differs not only from Ellen White's, but also from that taken by key Protestant Reformers, the 1974 Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conferences, and reputable non-Adventist Biblical scholars who reject the historical-critical method. In his presuppositions we discover that the real source of Thompson's thesis is not the Bible nor the writings of Ellen White. (4) In the course of this critique, we will compare the differing incarnational models of Thompson and Ellen White by noting one example of their Biblical interpretation. We will now consider evidence for these four conclusions respectively.

Thompson's Use of the Two Ellen White Documents

We need to realize that there are other Seventh-day Adventist scholars who support the human view of Scripture that Thompson presents.³ Most of these do so because of their acceptance of the historical-critical method of Biblical study and presuppositions not in harmony with Scripture. Thompson does not argue his case on the basis of this method, however, but claims to develop his "incarnational" view of inspiration on the basis of the two Ellen White documents mentioned above.⁴

For most Seventh-day Adventists, such an appeal to Ellen White gives Thompson's thesis greater legitimacy than mere reference to personal views. It is one thing to write out one's convictions, it is another to claim authenticity for them from Ellen White.

Thompson says these two documents are "a primary point of reference for all that follows,"⁵ and adds that "the Introduction to *Great Controversy* . . . helped me,"⁶ and *Selected Messages* "significantly shaped my own view of inspiration."⁷ He claims that his "practical approach using the *incarnational* model allows for the mysterious blending of the human and divine."⁸ He notes, "Authors tend to emphasize either the human or the divine, rather than keep both in balance."⁹ He then devotes most of his book to the human side, in spite of the fact that he says "Adventists . . . have a marvelous

opportunity to establish, *as a community*, a view of Scripture that gives proper weight to both the human and the divine."¹⁰

Why this almost exclusive focus on the human? From his book we learn that he overcame his fear of Scripture,¹¹ and has written this volume to show the humanity of Scripture in order for readers to avoid "the possibility of a deadly surprise," a "fatal contradiction," that might cause their faith to collapse.¹² Here we catch a glimpse of his basic presupposition—Scripture has contradictions that could shake one's faith.

Is it fair of Thompson to translate Ellen White's balanced divine-human focus on the unity of Scripture into support for his human preoccupation, or to translate her concentration on the unity in Scripture into support for his confinement to its alleged contradictions or differences? Furthermore, would not an emphasis on the unity of Scripture be a better approach to removing the alleged fear of the Bible than concentration on alleged contradictions?

Thompson's three hundred and some pages are given mostly to looking at the human side of the Word,¹³ and, in my opinion, make it as unbalanced as those to which he refers in the preface. Curiously, he advocates that the church "hear advocates on both sides of the issue, those affirming the divinity and those recognizing the humanity of Scripture."¹⁴ Although neither would be presenting a balanced incarnational model (necessitating an unbalanced, onesided emphasis on the divine or the human aspect), his book fits the latter category. More than that, Thompson fails to do justice to the basic Ellen White documents upon which he seeks to build, in that Ellen White focuses on truth as God's revelation and unity in the messages given. Thompson focuses instead on human words and thoughts, and argues for the diversity in the messages written. Thus he neither makes the balanced incarnational contribution he calls for, nor does he do justice to the basic Ellen White documents that he claims to model.

Hence, judged by his own standard, Thompson's thesis fails. Although attempting to offer an incarnational model of inspiration, he ends up giving only the human side without proper deference to the divine; a type of Docetic, or Arian, reductionist-incarnational approach to Scripture. Such a presentation, I submit, falls far short

of the promised unique contribution that an Adventist can and should make to the present debate in Protestantism.

A Union of the Divine and Human that Cannot Be Broken

With this preliminary overview of Thompson's book before us, let us look at some facts. We begin with the two basic Ellen White documents that Thompson suggests undergird his thesis. Although they do speak of the human aspect in Scripture, notice what they also say about the divine. Ellen White produces a truly integrated and unified, balanced incarnational model. Thompson does give a half page to some of these in passing,¹⁶ but they are either non-determinative or ignored in his thesis. I also wish to submit that Ellen White's focus is an incarnational view of **revelation**, and not of **inspiration**. In the same way that the God-man (living Word) was God's revelation to man, divine thought through human expression (written Word), is God's revelation to man. It seems to me that more than inspiration is involved in Ellen White's comparison of Christ and the Bible. She insists that "the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human."¹⁶ This "union" cannot be broken.

First, I will present a brief summary of Thompson's "incarnational" model; then I will present Ellen White's. A quick comparison shows they are not the same. Thompson speaks of "apparently contradictory proverbs,"¹⁷ "many differences,"¹⁸ and individuals who "let some do their thinking for them . . . even the Bible."¹⁹ He talks about beginning "to relieve the constant need for harmonization,"²⁰ because there are "diverse interpretations."²¹ He even quotes Ellen White, suggesting that she claims that the Bible is not infallible.²² However, she states that the Bible is the "Book of books, which God has given to man as an infallible guide."²³

Ellen White's position is found in the two documents that Thompson claims as the basis for his thesis. Note how Ellen White not only differs from Thompson, but how she evaluates those who focus on the contradictions rather than upon the unity in Scripture—that is upon the human rather than upon the divine aspect in Scripture. The conclusions Thompson claims as issuing from these Ellen White documents are the precise conclusions she rejects in her writings. Look at the evidence.

A. Overview of *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 15-23:

- a. Look to revealed truth beyond the human mistakes.
- b. It is dangerous to focus on "apparent inconsistencies."
- c. The brightest student of God's Word will find in God's Word "treasures of truth."
- d. "Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge, which they think is very deep, talk of the contradictions of the Bible, and question the authority of the Scriptures."
- e. "The illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole, but it requires patience, thought, and prayer to trace out the precious golden thread."
- f. On the Emmaeus road Christ demonstrated the proper approach to Scripture. "How quickly He straightened out the tangled ends and showed the unity and divine verity of the Scriptures. How much men in these times need their understanding opened."
- g. It is not the words, but the thoughts, that are inspired.
- h. "The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction."
- i. Inspiration defined: "Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit."

B. Overview of *The Great Controversy*, pp. v-xii:

- a. Inspiration defined: "The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men."
- b. "But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine with the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man."

- c. "As several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony."
- d. "A different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all."
- e. "The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven."
- f. "The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His [God's] will."
- g. The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation."
- h. Ellen White's experience: "As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His Word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed."

Ellen White's definition of her incarnational position focuses on divinely revealed truth through human communication, and in that order. That is to say, the truths are divine, authoritative, infallible even though communicated to humans through human, finite, limited language. She stresses the unity of truth as she stresses the unity of Scripture. By contrast Thompson's so-called "incarnational model" looks at the humanness of Scripture, which he views through his own eyes and sees as mostly inspiration, not revelation.²⁴ He emphasizes the differences. Whereas the discerning reader goes past the differences to the revealed truth as Ellen White suggests, according to Thompson the bright student needs to pass by the unity of revealed truth to concentrate on differences because his unity of Scripture is allegedly found in a motivational focus, not in doctrine.²⁵ We should remember Wolfhart Pannenberg's observation that "the assertion of a doctrinal unity of the biblical witnesses has been made impossible by the work of critical historical research."²⁶ This type of research is basic to much of what Thompson presents.

The incarnational model is not new. It is used differently by

the evangelicals such as Rene Pachè²⁷ and Eta Linnemann,²⁸ or the liberal and historical-critical James Barr,²⁹ and the neo-Orthodox theologian Karl Barth.³⁰ Ellen White's incarnational view expressed in the two documents under review is that the divine revelation of God is communicated equally through the words of Scripture as through the divine-human Jesus Christ. Both are God's self-revelation to man. In both God takes the initiative and is present. Both were brought about by the Holy Spirit, and can only be discerned through that same Spirit.

Thompson's near obsession with the humanness of Scripture reminds us of those immersed in the several quests for the historical Jesus. Both are equally one-sided studies of the human without due place given to the divine.³¹ The incarnational model can, like Christology, take the low view or the high view. The low view focuses on the human side of Scripture (as does Thompson), whereas the high view focuses on the divine-human union presented in Scripture (as does Ellen White). Look at it this way, when Jesus, the living Word, walked among men many throughout His life took a low view of Him. He was just another man and nothing more. They failed to see Him as the God-man. The high view of Jesus Christ necessitates that He be understood as Immanuel, God with us, in His very person and being.

A third incarnational model, besides the two referenced by Thompson, is given by Ellen White in *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 746-748. Concerning both Christ and the Bible, she says: "In the work of God for man's redemption, divinity and humanity are combined."³² In other words, this unity of the divine and human makes both Christ and the Bible unique, different from any other person or book. Paul has the same understanding of Scripture. Speaking to the Thessalonians, he said, "And we also thank God continually, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

Ellen White's View of Scripture Overlooked by Thompson

At least ten times, throughout his book, Thompson gives Ellen White credit for influencing his thinking.³³ He believes "the church

has paid dearly for not taking better advantage of the insights on inspiration from the pen of Ellen White."³⁴ He suggests: "With reference to inspiration, we do not realize the treasure that we have in Ellen White's explicit statements. Time and again in recent years, when speaking on the topic of inspiration in local churches and especially those that have been torn apart by dissension on this topic, I hear the exclamation cropping up in the question-and-answer period, tinged both with exasperation and sadness, 'Why has there been so much controversy when Ellen White makes it so plain?'"³⁵ He comments on "the great value of Ellen White's writings on inspiration" asking, "If Ellen White held such a practical and balanced view of Scripture, why has such a view not been more widely held in the church?"³⁶ He affirms her writings, saying, "My own study of her writings has convinced me that she was a remarkably practical and broad-minded woman with a keen perception of the nature of Scripture."³⁷ He emphasizes "the great value of Ellen White's writings on inspiration,"³⁸ saying, "Finally, my prayer is that Ellen White's model for studying Scripture could become ours. The goal is a daunting one, but it is one worth praying for."³⁹ He concludes, "Initially, I was a bit startled when one of my friends who read this book in manuscript form described it as 'an act of gratitude to Ellen White.'"⁴⁰

Ellen White is referred to by name, or a quote, at least one hundred and seventy-six times throughout Thompson's book. Yet, nowhere in the book does he present Ellen White's views on Scripture. The best he does, is to present his own views based upon his own understanding, a misinterpretation, of her two basic documents as noted above. The subtitle of *Inspiration* is "Hard Questions, Honest Answers." I find it less than honest to speak so glowingly of Ellen White's views, and then never present them, except from only two major documents from which he draws selectively. She has much more to say than he admits, and that precisely in contrast to his own theory.

Consider the evidence. Thompson claims that it is "inappropriate . . . simply to turn around and impose the New Testament interpretation on the Old."⁴¹ He claims that the New Testament is not the "final interpreter of the Old Testament."⁴² Where is progressive revelation in this? Paradoxically, he can find progressive

understanding in Ellen White, but apparently not in the Bible.⁴³ In contrast, Ellen White says "the New Testament explains the Old,"⁴⁴ while the "doors of the New Testament are unlocked with the key of the Old Testament."⁴⁵ This is why Christ was able to teach the way He did. "Christ's lessons were not a new revelation, but old truths which he himself had originated and given to the chosen of God, and which he came to earth to rescue from the error under which they had been buried."⁴⁶ These determinative insights from Ellen White are omitted in Thompson's casebook approach to Scripture,⁴⁷ even though in passing he does mention that one inspired writer can "drop a hint" that "will open up great windows of light on another passage," and that "Ellen White opened up the Old Testament for me."⁴⁸ But these ideas are not normative to his thesis.

Thompson's "unified system," with emphasis on full Biblical diversity, is his "law pyramid."⁴⁹ He indicates that Biblical writers, with different interpretations, point "their interpretation toward the fulfillment of the one, the two, and the ten" principles of the law pyramid.⁵⁰ Then he asks "What would happen to our ability to work together if we focused every act of interpreting Scripture toward the task of expounding the one, the two, and the ten?"⁵¹ In contrast to the alleged contradictions in Scripture, Thompson sees his "law pyramid" as an "absolute"⁵² and the "Basis of Stability."⁵³ In other words, law is central, for "each passage serves to win allegiance to the law of love,"⁵⁴ and while "revelation's task is to point to the law of love; reason's task is to describe and understand how each writer has done so."⁵⁵

In complete contrast to Thompson's law pyramid Ellen White takes the position that "the Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ."⁵⁶ In fact, Christ's "ministry is the key that unlocks the Old Testament Scriptures, giving access to their rich treasures."⁵⁷ Concerning both Testaments, she states, "Both meet together in Christ."⁵⁸ She advises that "every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary."⁵⁹ Ellen White focuses on the great unity of Scripture in Christ rather than in principles derived from law, as Thompson does. (See Gerhard F. Hasel's analysis of

Thompson's "law pyramid" in this volume). Although Thompson repeatedly praises or refers to Ellen White, apparently in an attempt to bolster his thesis, he totally disregards those of her insights that stand in opposition to his conclusions. If Ellen White has been the great influence in his thinking, as he claims, he should have presented a balanced picture of all that she has to say on the subject rather than to choose selectively. More importantly, her Christ-centered focus on Scripture provides the only safe hermeneutical principle for Biblical study. (For the Old Testament: Luke 24:27; for the New Testament: John 14:25, 26; 15:26, 27).

Further, Thompson dubs as a merely "theoretical unity" that which "would require that every inspired writer 'agree' with every other inspired writer in the interpretation of Scripture."⁶⁰ By contrast Ellen White takes the position that "Scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages,"⁶¹ for "the Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be the key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident."⁶²

Ellen White never suggests a "casebook" method as Thompson proposes, nor does she spend the time looking at Biblical diversity as Thompson does. Her focus, method, and clear statements oppose his thesis. Even in the two basic Ellen White documents, where Thompson claims to find his thesis, she speaks of the Bible as a "guidebook" twice.⁶³ I find it unconscionable that Thompson's theory is presented under the cover of references to Ellen White, while it fails to represent her. It seems to me that, under the appearance of representing Ellen White, Thompson actually is promoting his own basic presuppositions that she does not share. To these we now turn.

Thompson's Basic Presuppositions and the Views of Other Scholars

It has been noted that Thompson's so-called "incarnational model" is close to being fully human, and, therefore, unbalanced and different from the two basic documents of Ellen White that he claims as its basis, and also different from her other writings on

Scripture. We now are ready to see what lies behind his position, and to note how it also differs from that of other respected non-Adventist scholars.

A. The Reformer's Principles of *sola scriptura*

Thompson's denial of an inspired author as the final interpreter of another inspired author,⁶⁴ calls in question the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, in which the Bible is its own interpreter. It is paradoxical that he even quotes Ellen White relative to "comparing scripture with scripture" without that statement ever influencing his thesis.⁶⁵ Biblical interpretation, for Thompson, involves not just knowing the Bible but knowing God.⁶⁶ Although there is truth in this, if knowing God replaces the objectivity of the Bible's being its own interpreter, then we are left with too subjective a norm (experience) as the interpreter of Scripture.

Within such a subjective context consider the following proposal. Thompson asks that if a fellow believer were to say, "I understand that Old Testament passage differently than Paul does"? Would such a statement imply loss of confidence in Paul?"⁶⁷ He answers his own question. "Inspired writers should not hinder ordinary believers (i.e., those not inspired in a special sense) from pursuing their God-given responsibilities to interpret the text of Scripture for themselves, *even if their interpretation may differ from that of a credentialed inspired writer.*"⁶⁸ I believe the evidence supports the conclusion that this perspective also guides his interpretation of Ellen G. White.

Here we have the logical result of denying the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. Thompson takes the same view that the Papacy does, with the exception that Catholicism gives authority to tradition (the church) rather than to the individual or to the believing community. It was this false view that stirred the opposition of the Reformers, who held to the high view of Scripture as the divine Word of God. "Scripture interprets Scripture." This still holds.

B. Adventist Bible Conferences (1974)

Thompson advocates and uses the historical-critical method of Biblical study.⁶⁹ In regard to the 1974 Seventh-day Adventist

Church Bible Conferences, which opposed the use of the historical critical method, Thompson takes the position that "many of the church's biblical scholars argued that the descriptive aspects of the method (e.g., the descriptive elements in source criticism, form criticism, redactional criticism) could be used productively to serve the church's needs. The conservative response (and the position generally held by the church's administrative leadership) was that use of any part necessitated the use of the whole."⁷⁰ He adds: "The ferment of the 1970's continues, and this book grows out of it."⁷¹ This, and not a desire to present Ellen White's view of Scripture or the Bible's own internal view, is the apparent objective of Thompson's book.

By contrast with Thompson's view of the 1974 Bible Conferences, C. Raymond Holmes, director of the Doctor of Ministry program at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University, and a convert in 1974 from the Lutheran church where he functioned as a pastor, rejoiced in print recently over the solid stand for God's Word taken in the 1974 Bible Conferences.⁷² Richard M. Davidson, Chairman of the Old Testament Department, S.D.A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University, speaks of his own pilgrimage from using the historical-critical method to giving it up due to the 1974 Bible Conference. He states: "While attending that conference, I awoke as from a dream. I came to realize that my approach to the Scriptures had been much like Eve's approach to God's spoken word. She was exhilarated by the experience of exercising autonomy over the word of God, deciding what to believe and what to discard. She exalted her human reason over divine revelation. When she did so, she opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Like Eve, I had felt the heady ecstasy of setting myself up as the final norm, as one who could judge the divine Word by my rational criteria. Instead of the Word judging me, I judged the Word." He concludes "I am now convinced that the issue of the authority of Scripture is basic to all other issues in the church. The destiny of our church depends on how its members regard the authority of the Bible."⁷³ I agree, and that is why I believe Thompson's book must be seen for what it really is.

We need to remember two facts: (1) The Lutheran Missouri Synod (given only seven lines by Thompson),⁷⁴ in its September,

1972 report concerning the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, discovered, "Many members of the faculty, and the administration and exegetical department, are fully committed to the use of the historical-critical method as a valid and preferred method for the interpretation of the Bible. The administration and faculty claim to have purged the method of its negative aspects by the use of 'Lutheran presuppositions' [similar to Thompson's Adventist claim mentioned above]. However, the evidence gathered by the Fact Finding Committee indicates that the essentials of the historical-critical method as used elsewhere are also adhered to at the St. Louis Seminary."⁷⁵ (2) Eta Linnemann's conclusion is remarkably the same as that cited from Adventist denominational leadership in the 1970's. She concluded, "One can no more be a *little* historical-critical than a *little pregnant*."⁷⁶ This is a statement from a professor who taught the historical-critical method for years, but has in recent times turned her back on it and turned to the Bible.

C. Eta Linnemann Differs with Thompson

It would be well to briefly compare Thompson's view of the historical-critical method with that of a recent (1990) book by Eta Linnemann, entitled *Historical Criticism of the Bible. Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical*. She takes a diametrically opposite view regarding the historical-critical method.

Her translator, Robert W. Yarbrough, says, "Linnemann lodges a strong protest against the tendencies and methods of a discipline which she knows from the inside out. She is not taking potshots from afar; she was a diligent and receptive student of some of this century's truly seminal thinkers in German New Testament scholarship: Bultmann, Fuchs, Gogarten, and Ebeling. Later, inducted into the world's most prestigious professional society for New Testament research, she was the peer of many others of like stature."⁷⁷ Unlike Thompson, and some other Adventist Biblical scholars, she totally rejects the historical-critical method of Biblical study. Her incarnational model of Scripture also is different from Thompson's and agrees basically with that of Ellen G. White.⁷⁸

Dr. Linnemann is one of a number of reputable scholars who have come to realize the perilous dangers of approaching God's

Holy Book with man-made critical methods.⁷⁹ She says, "My 'No!' to historical-critical theology stems from my 'Yes!' to my wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to the glorious redemption accomplished for me on Golgotha."⁸⁰ She tells of the radical change she made, like a modern Paul on the Damascus road. She records, "About a month after this [after realizing that she had misled her students by using the historical-critical method], alone in my room and quite apart from any input from others around me, I found myself faced with a momentous decision. Would I continue to control the Bible by my intellect, or would I allow my thinking to be transformed by the Holy Spirit."⁸¹

She faced the choice that every Seventh-day Adventist professor of theology and the Bible must face: Will I judge the Bible or allow the Bible to judge me? Linnemann states: "Not because of human talk but because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in my heart, I have clear knowledge that my former perverse teaching was sin. At the same time I am happy and thankful that this sin is forgiven me because Jesus bore it on the cross. That is why I say 'No!' to historical-critical theology. I regard everything that I taught and wrote before I entrusted my life to Jesus as refuse. I wish to use this opportunity to mention that I have pitched my two books *Gleichnisse Jesu* [*The Parables of Jesus*] and *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* [*Studies in the Passion Narrative*], along with my contributions to journals, anthologies, and *Festschriften*. Whatever of these writings I had in my possession I threw into the trash with my own hands in 1978."⁸² Linnemann now focuses on the divine-human Scripture, and I trust that Thompson will do the same some day.

For anyone tempted to embark on the journey called for by Thompson, Linnemann's insights are worth pondering carefully. "Because one has decided that the thought content of the Bible should actually be recognized independently, the unity of the Bible is dissolved and God's Word can no longer serve as its own interpreter."⁸³

"Differences between individual books of Holy Scripture are blown out of proportion and played up as inconsistencies."⁸⁴ "The theologian does not, by virtue of his academic study, occupy the judge's bench. God alone is right."⁸⁵ Therefore, "Thought must

subordinate itself to the Word of God. If difficulties crop up, it does not doubt God's Word but it's own wisdom. It asks God for wisdom in the expectation that it will receive what it has requested, waiting patiently for God's timing. It presupposes the truth and the unity of God's Word and it is for that reason in a position to recognize and experience that truth and unity in a very real way. It believes the Scripture, which says of itself that it is divinely given."⁸⁶

As Daniel B. Clendenin said of classic exegetes, they "were 'more attentive' to the text, which is to say that they came to the text to listen and not to question. Instead of coming to the texts as subjects who lord it over an objective datum they saw themselves as objects and the text as the subject."⁸⁷

In the same way that Ellen G. White does, Eta Linnemann stresses Biblical unity. She writes, "God's inspired Word, which has many human authors but ultimately only one divine originator, exhibits a wonderful unity. As soon as I accept by faith the self-testimony of the Word of God regarding the inspiration of Scripture, I begin to realize this wondrous unity."⁸⁸ Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. states: "Ever since the second half of the eighteenth century, men of the Enlightenment⁸⁹ and their intellectual descendants have found themselves compelled as men making decisions in research to press the case for the Scripture's multiplicity, variegation, and diversity. By and large, no internal coherence was possible since, in their estimation, the observed tensions amounted to contradictions."⁹⁰

An Example of Biblical Interpretation Comparing Thompson's and Ellen White's Methods

The radically divergent incarnational models of Scripture presented by Thompson and Ellen G. White can be summarized as (1) the humanity of Scripture with its alleged contradictions and insurmountable diversity (Thompson), contrasted with (2) the Divine-human unity of Scripture (White). This fundamental difference between Thompson and Ellen G. White is further demonstrated by Thompson's selective use of her writings—ignoring her contribution that undermines his basic presuppositions. These important differences between Thompson and Ellen G. White can

now be demonstrated by one example of their respective Biblical interpretations.

The example revolves around whether Exodus 2, Acts 7 and Hebrews 11 can be harmonized? Even though Thompson admits, in passing, "an underlying harmony,"⁹¹ he still says of these three passages, "Most striking in the story of Moses is the statement that he left Egypt 'not being afraid of the anger of the king' (verse 27). In Exodus his fear of the king was precisely the reason why he left . . . It would greatly impoverish our reading of Scripture were we to feel we had to homogenize and harmonize the stories of Exodus 2, Acts 7, and Hebrews 11 into a single account. I don't think it is appropriate to insist that Acts and Hebrews conform to Exodus any more than Acts and Hebrews should be allowed to dictate the interpretation of Exodus. Let each voice speak: the dangers of pride, the dangers of rebellion, and the beauty of an abiding faith—three lessons from a single story, and all very helpful for the Christian life today."⁹² Thompson makes more of the differences than the harmony, and suggests that the harmony is found in his principles abstracted in his law pyramid hypothesis.⁹³ But why not look for the harmony within the accounts? Particularly if all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). Thompson looks at the three passages as if they talk about the same event. There are some matters of differing emphases that any three accounts would be expected to provide, and yet within a definite harmony. But Thompson views Exodus 2 and Hebrews 11 as if they were speaking of the same event and notes the difference between them. But they do not relate the same event! Notice that Exodus 2 discusses the escape of Moses into Midian. Hebrews 11 deals with his leaving Egypt forty years later. In the first event Moses fled from Pharaoh in fear (see Exod. 2:14-15; Acts 7:29), but after God trained him for forty years in the wilderness, he could leave Egypt unafraid of Pharaoh (Heb. 11:27). Rather than reading into the record more of a difference than is legitimate, why not recognize the correct setting and conclude that God can change a person from fear to a person of faith in forty years? The fact that Moses' lack of fear is attributed to "seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27, KJV) makes sense.

It is significant that Ellen G. White supports this change in Moses' attitude. His slaying of the Egyptian was actually "taking

into [his] own hands the work that God had promised to do. . . . He had yet to learn the same lesson of faith that Abraham and Jacob had been taught—not to rely upon human strength or wisdom, but upon the power of God.”⁹⁴ During the forty years wilderness experience “his pride and self-sufficiency were swept away” and he came forth “strong in faith in the mighty God of Jacob.”⁹⁵

If Thompson had allowed the two incarnational documents presented by Ellen G. White, as well as her other writings on Scripture, to inform his thinking relative to Biblical unity—his conclusion on these passages would have been different. Unlike Thompson, a number of scholars deny contradiction in these passages, seeing (in different ways) a deeper level of unity. For example, anyone may read what William Barclay,⁹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski,⁹⁷ Donald Guthrie,⁹⁸ Leon Morris,⁹⁹ and F. F. Bruce¹⁰⁰ say on this passage.

Conclusion

As previously noted, Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., reminds us that ever since the Enlightenment scholars have focused on what they consider to be contradictions in Scripture, just as Thompson does.¹⁰¹ Dispensationalism also focuses on alleged differences in Scripture, instead of upon the one plan of salvation. For example, Lewis Chafer states, “A plan of interpretation which, in defence of an ideal unity of the Bible, contends for a single divine purpose, ignores drastic contradictions, and is sustained only by occasional or accidental similarities, is doomed to confusion when confronted with the many problems which such a system imposes on the text of Scripture . . .”¹⁰² Those who buy into the historical-critical method (liberal-progressive scholars) or into Dispensationalism (ultra-conservative, literalistic scholars) both take a human view of Scripture, even though at opposite points of the theological spectrum. As O. T. Allis put it, “Higher Criticism divides Scripture up into Documents . . . Dispensationalism divides the Bible up into dispensations . . .”¹⁰³ Though this dividing of the word is different by each for different reasons, both result from a failure to grasp Biblical unity, and from a failure to understand a proper incarnational and theological view of Scripture. Hence both fail to rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Thompson’s thesis must be evaluated in the light of these facts. His casebook method is a

compartmentalizing of Scripture with the same results as any other dividing of Scripture that overlooks its inherent theological unity.¹⁰⁴

A true incarnational understanding of Scripture takes into account the way Christ related to Scripture. He overcame temptations by the Word (see Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), based His teaching on it (see Matt. 5:18, 19, 21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33-37, 38, 42-48; 11:13, 14, 21-24, 12:3-6, 40-42; 19:4-9; 21:42-44; 22:37-40, 43-45; 24:9-21, 29; 26:31, 32). Jesus quoted the Old Testament (see Matt. 21:13, 16), found reference to Himself throughout the Old Testament (see Luke 24:27), affirmed that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35, cf. Luke 16:17), and accepted Scripture as the Word of God (see Matt. 15:4, quoting Exod. 21:17; Matt. 22:31-32, quoting Exod. 3:6). He was a constant student of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁵ Rather than placing varying values on Scripture, Christ maintained a high view of God's Word that we must recapture in order to fulfill our destiny as the remnant church.

Says John Stott, Christ's "submission to Scripture is for us Evangelicals a sign of our submission to Christ, a test of our loyalty to him. We find it extremely impressive that our incarnate Lord, whose own authority amazed his contemporaries, should have subordinated himself to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures as he did, regarding them as his Father's written word."¹⁰⁶

One final question, perhaps the most crucial in evaluating Thompson's use of Ellen White. If, as he says, "one inspired writer cannot be the final interpreter of another,"¹⁰⁷ then, on what basis does he turn (selectively and partially) to Ellen White to interpret inspiration in the sixty-six books of the Bible?

Endnotes

¹ Alden Thompson, *Inspiration. Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), pp. 23-36.

² From Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, pp. 432, 433, Thompson selectively mentions that the reason there are four Gospels is because God does not impress all minds alike. He leaves out the following ideas that contradict his thesis: "The Gospels differ, but the records of all blend in one harmonious whole" (p. 432), and "They should subordinate all preconceived

opinions, and take the Bible as their lesson book, *comparing scripture with scripture*" (p. 433, italics supplied, see Thompson, pp. 44, 45).

3 For a starter, see *Ministry*, December, 1991, p. 28, in which Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke, formerly Bible teacher at Atlantic Union College and now at the University of East Africa, highly recommends Thompson's book.

4 Thompson, p. 51; cf. pp. 146, 253.

5 Thompson, p. 16.

6 Thompson, p. 54.

7 Thompson, p. 51.

8 Thompson, p. 220.

9 Thompson, p. 17.

10 Thompson, p. 19. See page 95, where Thompson expresses the belief that "articulating a truly incarnational model of inspiration" is "one of the special contributions that American Adventists have to make."

11 Thompson, pp. 85, 165.

12 Thompson, pp. 75, 85, 164-166, 263, 264.

13 He does try to be more balanced in chapter 8.

14 Thompson, p. 96.

15 Thompson, p. 95.

16 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 8.

17 Thompson, p. 101.

18 Thompson, p. 19.

19 Thompson, p. 106.

20 Thompson, p. 191.

21 Thompson, p. 264.

22 Thompson, p. 97.

23 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 394.

24 Concerning the Bible he says, "Where Scripture claims revelation, let's accept it. But much of Scripture makes no such claim. We need to remember that when we study historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles. Inspiration? Always. Revelation? Sometimes—and most certainly when the Bible tells us so" (p. 49).

25 Thompson, pp. 263, 264.

26 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. 1, Trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 194.

27 Rene Pachè, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans Helen I. Needham, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 35-42. He says, "We have just seen that by the incarnation Christ is at once perfect God (John 1:1, 14; 20:28; Rom. 9:5) and perfect man (Heb. 2:14, 17). The Scriptures also, by the miracle of inspiration, are at the same time a divine word and a human word." p. 40. Cf. Clark H. Pinnock, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967). Pinnock says, "The Bible reaches us in a form which does not strike our senses as miraculous. It partakes of the reality of the Incarnation. This attempt to make a virtue out of a problem is most unsuccessful, however. For it is no part of the Gospel that the humanity of Jesus made him a sinner, nor that the human authorship of the Bible made it errant and fallible" (p. 30).

28 "It is likewise said that Holy Scripture is both Word of God and word of man, as our Lord Jesus is God and man according to church confession. The same confession, however, asserts that these natures of Christ are 'without confusion, without separation' (definition of Chalcedon, A. D. 451). It is therefore not

permissible, and also not possible, to sort out the time-conditioned human word from the eternally valid divine Word."—Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible, Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 123.

29 James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984). "One way in which one may think is through the analogy of the traditional orthodox account of the nature of Christ. According to this doctrine, the incarnate Christ is equally God and man. He is not a sort of compound which is half one and half the other, nor is he a superhuman being lifted out of the sphere of humanity. A physical or medical examination of Jesus would not have discovered signs that he was different from other members of the human race. Yet orthodox Christianity affirms that he was the Son of God. The fact of his divinity does not modify, but exists alongside, the fact of his humanity. Let us suppose that this relationship can be applied to holy scripture. It would suggest that scripture can be at once and the same time a completely human product, having all the weakness, the variability, the contingency, the historically-relatedness of the human, and yet at the same time be the Word of God, through which the eternal God communicates with us, and we with him. Inspiration might then be thought of as the link, the bond, that holds the being of scripture as word of God and its being as word of man together in one" (pp. 125, 126).

30 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1-4/4, Editors G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1969). One example: "Just because we regard the Word of God not merely as proclamation and Scripture but as God's revelation in proclamation and Scripture, we must regard it in its identity with God Himself. God's revelation is Jesus Christ, God's Son" (1/1, p. 155).

31 For example, see *US News and World Report*, July 1, 1991, pp. 57, 58.

32 P. 747.

33 Thompson, pp. 51, 85, 90, 119, 121, 135-136, 165, 249, 251.

34 Thompson, p. 52.

35 Thompson, p. 53.

36 Thompson, p. 258.

37 Thompson, p. 85.

38 Thompson, p. 258.

39 Thompson, p. 259.

40 Thompson, p. 258.

41 Thompson, p. 207.

42 Thompson, p. 251.

43 Thompson, pp. 290, 291.

44 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

45 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 579.

46 *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1689.

47 "We should make the Bible its own expositor" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 106) is quoted but does not seem to inform Thompson's methodology.

48 Thompson, p. 251.

49 Thompson, p. 114. The law-pyramid, from base up, is the many laws (first level), the Decalogue (second level), the two principles of love to God and love to man (third level), and love (top level).

50 Thompson, p. 213.

51 Thompson, p. 213.

- 52 Thompson, pp. 120, 121.
- 53 Thompson, p. 244.
- 54 Thompson, p. 263.
- 55 Thompson, p. 263.
- 56 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 128.
- 57 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 229.
- 58 Ellen G. White, MS 33, 1897, in *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1092.
- 59 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.
- 60 Thompson, p. 263.
- 61 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 581.
- 62 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 187.
- 63 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 15, 16.
- 64 Thompson, pp. 205-213.
- 65 Thompson, p. 259.
- 66 Thompson, p. 107.
- 67 Thompson, p. 213.
- 68 Thompson, p. 211 (emphasis supplied).
- 69 Thompson, pp. 269-272.
- 70 Thompson, p. 270.
- 71 Thompson, p. 42.
- 72 C. Raymond Holmes, "1974 Revisited: An Answer to 'Private Interpretation' of the Scriptures," *Adventist Perspectives* 2/1 (1988), pp. 57-63.
- 73 Richard M. Davidson, "The Authority of Scripture. A Personal Pilgrimage," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/1 (1990), p. 41.
- 74 Thompson, p. 270. Thompson speaks of some 40 moderate and liberal professors and 400 students marching off the Concordia campus, leaving just four professors and 50 students. What he does not say is that immediately seven faculty were hired and 33 taken on part time (*Time*, March 4, 1974) and that by September there were 190 students enrolled (*Time*, Sep. 9, 1974).
- 75 *Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, being the 49th Regular Convention of the Synod, held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 9-16, 1971, p. 22.
- 76 Eta Linnemann, p. 123 (emphasis supplied).
- 77 Linnemann, p. 7.
- 78 See endnote 29.
- 79 See Norman R. Gulley, "The Battle for Biblical Eschatology in the End Time," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/2 (Autumn 1990) pp. 22-36, particularly pp. 27, 28.
- 80 Thompson, p. 17.
- 81 Linnemann, p. 19.
- 82 Linnemann, p. 20.
- 83 Linnemann, p. 121.
- 84 Linnemann, pp. 85, 86.
- 85 Linnemann, p. 113.
- 86 Linnemann, p. 111.
- 87 Daniel B. Clendenin, "Learning to Listen: Thomas C. Oden on Postcritical Orthodoxy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34/1 (March 1991), p. 99 (97-102).
- 88 Linnemann, p. 151.

- 89 Compare with Thompson's comments on the Enlightenment, pp. 140-142, 245.
- 90 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 23.
- 91 Thompson, p. 210.
- 92 Thompson, pp. 210, 211.
- 93 Thompson, p. 211.
- 94 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 247.
- 95 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251. cf. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 476, 477 and *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 651, 652.
- 96 William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 157.
- 97 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle of Hebrews and James* (Minnesota: Augsburg Pub. House, 1966), p. 411.
- 98 Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Hebrews (Leicester, England: IVP, 1988), p. 240.
- 99 Leon Morris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, ed. F. G. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), p. 127.
- 100 F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Hebrews (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 321, 322.
- 101 Kaiser, pp. 14, 18, 86, 110, 264, 268.
- 102 Lewis S. Chafer, "Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93 (1936), p. 417.
- 103 Oswald T. Allis, "Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity of Scripture," *Evangelical Quarterly* 8 (1936), p. 24.
- 104 Dispensationalism divides Biblical data historically. Thompson's case-book seems to divide scripture existentially.
- 105 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 84.
- 106 David L. Edwards, John Stott, p. 85.
- 107 Thompson, p. 205

ON INSPIRATION AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

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Seventh-day Adventism is currently thriving. Even in the USA it is growing at a faster rate than mainstream Protestant denominations. For Adventists worldwide, these are heady days; but tumultuous days too, which some are describing as a crisis. There are tensions, of course, all part of a rapidly growing church, and, at times, portents of internal disunity. Therefore, some perceive that we are a divided house on such theological issues as social ethics, the place of women in the family and the church, and the role of Ellen G. White. It seems somewhat simplistic to claim, as some do, that differences over these and other contemporary issues have arisen merely because of our different cultural backgrounds. As for other Protestant churches around us that face similar challenges, the issue at stake is essentially one of authority, namely, how SDAs are going to do theology while holding to Biblical authority.¹ Can we agree on exactly what the Bible means for us and how it is to be heard and interpreted? Can we maintain our claim to Biblical authority as a distinctive hallmark if we cannot find a way to move effectively toward theological consensus?

The Issue of Revelation-Inspiration

There is little doubt that the claim of Biblical authority, buttressed by the scriptural doctrines of Biblical revelation and inspiration, takes a central place in Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Debate over the precise meaning and implications of these categories has shown up among us from time to time. Earlier this year, the publication of Thompson's volume *Inspiration. Hard Questions, Honest Answers*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991) reopened that debate.

Based on echoes coming my way, I believe the book has had a fairly wide readership and has aroused some deep reactions. Several of my Seminary Ph.D. students, among others, have been discussing these issues with me, individually or in smaller groups, orally or in written form, and have directly or indirectly contributed to this paper. I remember more particularly Kwabena Donkor from Ghana, Samuel Koranteng Pipim from the same part of the world, Sally Kiasiong-Andriamiarisoa from Mauritius, along with Jim Hiner and Thane Ury from the USA. I want to give them credit here and share our reactions with you.

A Book With an Undeniable Appeal

Alden Thompson's book has an undeniable appeal. Its accessibility, the easy flow of language, the avoidance of technical parlance contribute to making it a book for laypeople. Thompson has effectively opened the realm of the hermeneutical debate where it truly belongs, namely, to the believers in the pews. He projects the image of an Adventist scholar who holds the Bible to be the Word of God and is desirous to include the writings of Ellen White in his discussion of the issues. His call for an experiential as well as intellectual grasp of Scripture is another positive aspect of his work. Sin, clearly denounced, not merely in terms of individual acts but as a life lived apart from God, and the author's apprehensions regarding a tempting legalistic approach to life issues deserve credit too. Nor does he write in a vacuum. He expresses concern for the faith of his readers. Even if the way in which these concerns are addressed may seem questionable, one can hardly avoid recognizing their validity.

Certain views advocated by *Inspiration*, indeed, seem to me questionable. I wish there was time to address Thompson's subjectivism, his tendency now and then to assume that opponents to his views lack patience or courage, the inclination to introduce the psychological criterion of human experience to substantiate his assumptions, the unnerving propensity to raise what many per-

ceive as straw arguments and opponents before striking them down, the absence of a thorough objective evaluation of traditional views of inspiration and of the solutions they have suggested to the problems raised by the book, not to mention the want of a more representative sample of the more articulate opponents of his position. Some of these solutions will be provided by others. My aim in this article is to briefly address two or three foundational dimensions of Thompson's theory of inspiration which, in my opinion, deserve clarification, if not outright revision.

Revelation-Inspiration: Too Sharp a Cleavage

The writer's basic intention is to help others read the Bible without fear of the possibility of finding something that would shake their confidence in it, namely, apparent contradictions, differences and inaccuracies (14:1, 2).² To do so, he makes an attempt to come up with a model which will harmonize the divine and human elements in the Bible, some of the differences and apparent contradictions allegedly being a reflection of the human element.

Thompson's model is a classification of the Biblical material into "codebook" and "casebook" sections. Furthermore, the relationship between the two sections is a "law pyramid" which is advocated as enabling the reader to distinguish between these two sections. However, from the reading of the book it appears that at the very foundation of this model lies Thompson's understanding of the phenomena of revelation and inspiration. Let us consider these phenomena as they are appraised by our author.

One finds no precise definition of revelation in the book, although Thompson recognizes it as a Biblical given. He explains that revelation "suggests some kind of special input from God, a message from Him to His creatures on earth" (47:3). I plan to return later on to this feature of the Bible. At this point, let us simply say that I regret that no further information is provided as to the nature of this "special input." However, no such ambiguity exists regarding the *means* of revelation since visions, dreams, voices from heaven, words chiseled in stone by God's finger, and finally, Jesus Christ, are mentioned, among others (47:3-4). It appears that in his characterization of those means, Thompson restricts the phenomenon of revelation to direct communication of information from God to

the human person in which the senses are directly involved—"a visible and audible intervention of God" (57:1).

What about Inspiration? For Thompson, inspiration is "a fire in the bones" (50; 57:2). The inspired writer is one who is "fired up to speak for God" (53; cf. Jer 20:9). As it applies to Scripture, inspiration is "simply a means of indicating that the Holy Spirit has been present in a special way (56:4)). In summary, writes this author, inspiration is "the Spirit's special urging of a messenger to speak or write" (57:2).

The inspired prophet, explains Thompson, is driven by the Spirit to see a need and to speak to it (53:4). The source of the message may be revelation, research, or experience (*ibid.*); that is of lesser importance. What matters most is inspiration. The outcome here is that there are portions of inspired Scripture which do not originate in revelation, but rather in research and experience; although in all instances the fact of inspiration ensures that the writer is driven by the Spirit.

How does this action of the Spirit in inspiration differ from the special input from God in revelation? There is no answer on Thompson's part, although such a response certainly would have been helpful. If, indeed, it is the Spirit of God Who drives the inspired writer to see a need and to speak up, say, on the basis of research, is the inspired message any less revelational than when God grants a propositional revelation? Is there here no "special input" from God, that input which characterizes revelation? Or shall we conclude that the inspired writer stands in somewhat the same position as a preacher of the Word who under the guidance of the Spirit sees a need in the congregation and feels the urge to speak to it? It seems to me that the writer of this volume is not clear enough on the distinction between revelation and inspiration, a distinction he himself draws up quite dichotomically. This is the more important because the distinction that exists between revelation and inspiration underlies Thompson's understanding of Scripture.

That revelation be set so dichotomically from inspiration may be pertinent as a preparation for the model that Thompson later develops. He seems to see an *essential* distinction between the two. Thus, he is careful to underline that "all Scripture is given by

inspiration" (48:1), adding that "it may be the most crucial point in the whole book: *the Bible does not say that all Scripture was given by revelation*" (id., emphasis his). The matter is obviously of no minor importance.

The Love Command

Revelation and inspiration is not the only dichotomy that appears to be foundational to Thompson's understanding of the nature of Scripture. There are others, like the incarnational model of Scripture (87ff) which seeks to harmonize the "earthen vessel"—the human element, and the "treasure"—which exudes the glory of God (88:2). This incarnational model categorizes the biblical material into two other distinct groups, i.e., "codebook" and "casebook" sections (98ff).

A codebook is described as "an instrument of precision," "a law once given by God [that] should live forever" (99:10, 9) and which typically requires "obedient *compliance* more than thoughtful *reflection*" (99:11, emphasis his). On this basis, Thompson makes another major statement: "While Scripture contains some codebook elements, on balance, it is more like a casebook than a codebook" (99:13; cf. 109:2).

A broad description of the two types of materials may be that while the codebook elements are absolute and enduring, the casebook elements are fairly variable and time as well as place-related. Thompson pays a lot more attention to the casebook nature of Scripture with illustrations from the Book of Proverbs, prophetic counsel, words of Jesus, Biblical biographies, and apostolic advice (100-106). One can only regret that he does not quite explicitly discuss how he derives the casebook materials directly from Scripture.

At this point Thompson contends that all Biblical law is a commentary on the one great law of love which is the absolute foundation of God's being and government. But the critical issue, as far as Thompson's arguing is concerned, regards whether the love command—which he describes as the one central principle "universally authoritative"—may be used as a hermeneutical canon for interpreting all Scripture and determining what endures and what has come to an end. I wish he had seriously discussed this

crucial question rather than apparently taking the matter for granted.

It seems to me, indeed, that a more careful study of the New Testament shows that, while love is at the core of the commandments, it certainly is not the only one. Besides, the validity and applicability of other commandments do not seem to be decided by appeal to the demand of love. On the contrary, if I read the New Testament Scriptures aright, it appears to me, for example, that the continuity or discontinuity of Old Testament law within the New Testament writings is essentially determined not with reference to the love command but on the basis of a salvation-historical perspective which focuses on prophecy and historical fulfillment. There are Old Testament laws, such as ceremonial ones related to the sanctuary services, that have come to an end not on the basis of love, but because they have found their fulfillment in the person of Christ.

This "one eternal principle of love," further defined by "the *two* great commands and the *ten* commandments form the codebook portion of Scripture" (261:1, emphasis his), a pyramid that is "universally authoritative, stable, and enduring" (ibid.). Everything else in Scripture is described by Thompson as commentary, "a *casebook* illustrating through a variety of cases, the application of the *one*, the *two*, and the *ten*, in time and place" (ibid., emphasis in the text). Here again one is forced to ask if our author is not creating a "canon within the canon". The more so since the law pyramid is supposed to be the yardstick for resolving apparent conflicts among biblical commands (116-17, 122). Thompson adds that "the one, the two, and the ten form a pyramid of law that embodies the eternal principles of God's kingdom" (114:4), but does not tell us why he stops at the ten. Logic seems to demand that if the "two" are "defined" from the "one" and the "ten" from the "two," and all of these are expressions of principles which are endowed with permanence, then the "many" derived from the "ten" ought to acquire some measure of permanence too. Why should the list stop at the "ten"?

It appears, in fact, that the limit is determined by Thompson's understanding of the phenomena of revelation and inspiration. Given his insistence on the express distinction between the two phenomena and that he seems to relate the human, variable ele-

ments more with inspiration, we may wonder whether the boundaries of the elements of the law pyramid are not in fact set by their apparent relationship to revelation as Thompson defines it. Thus, the "one" and the "two" proceeded from Jesus Christ, God's supreme revelation, while the "ten" were inscribed by God's own finger. These indeed fit his understanding of revelation. The principles they embody have permanent value while the, "many" which by and large fit his view of inspiration, are merely commentary, culture, place, and time-bound. The real issue, I submit again, boils down to one's view of the scriptural concept of revelation.

Another Look at Revelation

Let us return to our author's perception of revelation. To what extent does it characterize Scripture? We noticed earlier that Thompson sees revelation as "some kind of official input from God" (47:3). While inspiration characterizes all biblical statements, revelation occurs only "sometimes—and most certainly when the Bible tells us so" (49:7). "We know," explains he, "that we are dealing with revelation" in Scripture when a prophet says "The word of the Lord came to me" or "I saw" (48:2a). To those who might still wonder, he affirms that "when we read the Bible perceptively, we discover hints that enable us to know where revelation occurs and where it did not" (48:3).

Therefore, "Where Scripture claims revelation, let's accept it. But much of Scripture makes no such claim. We need to remember that when we study historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles" (49:6). It is claimed that much of the Biblical material did not come by way of revelation but through research or experience (53:4). It is only in a secondary sense that it can be said that the Bible is revelation (48:0).

How reliable are such assumptions? How much room should they be granted in the elaboration of an Adventist doctrine of Revelation-Inspiration, and therefore of Biblical authority? They strike me as surprising, even stunning assertions. Let me address them, within the confines of this article, from the perspective of Ellen White's view on the subject. This is even more relevant as Thompson frequently quotes her, grants her apparently unreserved credit, and projects the image of an Adventist scholar quite partial

to her judgments, and rightly so. Here are some of her most pertinent remarks regarding historical passages which, except if they explicitly say so (49:6; 48:2), he holds, should not be regarded as claiming to result from revelation. While she most often refers to Scripture as the "inspired" Word of God, Ellen White, time and again, identifies the Bible as God's "revealed" word, without ever, in the slightest fashion, to my knowledge at least, indicating that this is true only "in a secondary sense" (cf. 48:0). Here are some examples limited to the Book of Genesis, a typical historical narrative concerned with the first 2500 years of human history. Comparing our times of rebellion against God's will with that of those who built the Tower of Babel, she writes: "There are tower-builders in our time. Infidels construct their theories from the supposed deductions of science and reject the *revealed* word of God" (pp. 123:4-124:0, emphasis mine). In a chapter devoted to the creation week, she warns us against those who, in the name of science, oppose "plain Scripture facts," and refuse to accept what "God has *revealed*" (pp. 113:2a). Notice that these "Scripture facts" as well as "what God has revealed" relate to the historical narratives found in the earliest historical Biblical writings.

She goes on, describing the creation story as "what God's word has *revealed*," and "*revelation*" (pp. 113:3, underlining supplied). It is, she explains, "from the Creator," that Adam learned the history of creation (p. 83:1b). There is no reluctance on her part to attach the category of revelation to the earliest historical passages in the Bible, even though (please note) they are not introduced in the book of Genesis by "I saw," or "I was shown." In the same volume, commenting on the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, she deplores that today likewise infidelity "is undermining faith in the Bible as a *revelation from God*" (p. 166:1, emphasis mine). Not only is the Bible a revelation of God, but a revelation *from* Him!

The first chapter of the fourth volume of her *Testimonies for the Church* also addresses various historical passages in the Bible. In the chapter entitled "Bible Biographies" Ellen White tells us that "the lives recorded in the Bible," from Adam down to the times of the apostles, "are authentic histories of actual individuals" (4 *Testimonies* 9:1). She describes these pages as "inspired history," written by "inspired writers" (id.), recorded by "the pen of inspira-

tion" (4 *Testimonies* 12:1). In these narratives, asserts she, "are revealed the snares and devices of Satan" (4 *Testimonies* 13:1, emphasis mine). All this is the work of God, who, in His mercy, "lifts the vail" and "shows" men and women that He discerns even their hidden motives (id.). She invites us to learn from those historic figures who rebelled against God and turned away from "the light of revealed truth" (4 *Testimonies* 14:0; emphasis mine). It is interesting to note how, in these volume four *Testimony* passages, Ellen White has been using the categories of revelation and inspiration side by side, if not interchangeably. Note also that she does not show the slightest hesitation to tell us that those narratives are the product of revelation. "With reference to inspiration," he writes (53:1), "we do not realize the treasure we have in Ellen White's explicit statements." I could not agree more, but I wish that his articulation of Ellen White's understanding of revelation were more cognizant of her view illustrated in the statements quoted above.

Are we to assume with Thompson that only "when a prophet says 'The word of the Lord came to me' or 'I saw,' we know that we are dealing with revelation," while otherwise we are dealing with Spirit-led research or experience, but "*not* revelation in the technical sense" (48:2, emphasis his)? I have serious doubts, and it seems to me that the Ellen White statements we just read present a serious challenge to any position of this kind.

One more example intended this time to address briefly Thompson's assertion that when we study not only the historical passages but also the New Testament epistles as well, we need to remember the fact that much of Scripture does not claim revelation (49:6). Depicting as a deep-rooted misconception the view that all inspired messages come as the result of visions or some other form of special revelation (48:1—49:1), he specifically points to Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian believers as presenting us with "a fairly obvious" example of material in Scripture that did *not* come by revelation (48:5, emphasis his). There Paul "tells the church outright that a report of the house of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) triggered his letter" (ibid.). While there is little doubt as to what triggered Paul's message, the question remains whether indeed "material in Scripture," i.e., the inspired message that followed came as a result

of "special revelation" (49:1)? I am here referring to Paul's counsel regarding whether a man should touch a woman, marriage, separation, meat sacrificed to idols, the hows and whys of the Lord's Supper, the nature and role of spiritual gifts, the reality of the resurrection, among other things. Here again, it appears that Ellen White fails to agree with our author. Note the following statement, quite instructive on the subject:

Paul was an inspired apostle. The truths he taught to others he had received 'by revelation;' yet the Lord did not directly reveal to him at all times just the condition of His people. In this instance, those who were interested in the prosperity of the church at Corinth, and who had seen evils creeping in, had presented the matter before the apostle; and from divine revelations which he had formerly received, he was prepared to judge of the character of these developments. Notwithstanding the fact that the Lord did not give him a new revelation for that special time, those who were really seeking for light accepted his message as expressing the mind of Christ. The Lord had shown him the difficulties and dangers which would arise in the churches, and as these evils developed, the apostle recognized their significance. He had been set for the defense of the church. He was to watch for souls as one who must render account to God; and was it not consistent and right for him to take notice of the reports concerning the anarchy and divisions among them? Most assuredly; and the reproof he sent them was as certainly written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God as were any of his other epistles: (*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 302:3-304:0).

Quite explicitly in the case of this letter, specifically singled out by Thompson as a "fairly obvious" example of the thesis he defends. Ellen White tells us that it was very much the result of divine revelation. Although it may indeed not have been based on a revelation granted immediately prior to its writing, it nonetheless is the result of revelation. Besides, once again the two categories of revelation and inspiration, rather than being sharply separated, are clearly tied together as components and expressions of a unique phenomenon.

Pursuing his argument that what happened in this particular case "did *not* come by way of special revelation" (49:0, emphasis mine), but was the result of Spirit-led research or some other source, Thompson concludes, "If Paul could get his information

from Chloe, it would seem appropriate that other inspired writers also find or receive information that did not come by way of special revelation" (48:5-49:0). May I paraphrase his reasoning and replace his question in the following fashion: If Paul, although he obtained information from a human source, did nevertheless write a message rooted in revelation, would it not seem appropriate to suggest that other inspired writers who also might have obtained human information did, likewise write messages founded on divine revelation, as, for instance, in the case of the gospel writers? Shall we so lightly, so freely, dismiss this probability?

Space prevents me from sharing a few remarks on Thompson's assertions regarding the Book of Psalms, for instance, for we need to come to a conclusion. As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, his thesis is not without merit. From a theological perspective, however, although well-meaning in its intention, he fails, in my opinion at least, to provide the explicit Biblical and inspired foundation that would support his case. From my perspective, the basic problem with Thompson's work is his understanding of revelation and inspiration which he sets up in an unyielding dichotomy. This perception, which seems to fall short of the Biblical and Ellen White evidence, appears to be the metaphysic on which the totality of Scripture is organized, a system of principles that underlies his thesis.

I do not want to convey the impression that, in my view, everything in the Bible is the outgrowth of revelation. Although this seems indeed to be the case, we simply do not know. What I do know, on the basis of the Biblical and Ellen White's testimony, is that we need to be much more careful regarding the role of revelation in the proclamation of the prophetic and apostolic message. *Much* more than what some of us may have thought is indeed the product of revelation. To hold that all is inspired but only part—i.e., a small part—is revealed and on that basis address and attempt to solve the apparently contradictory statements in Scripture remains unsatisfactory. Other solutions have been suggested by other students of God's Word, and they are worth examining. Various papers in this volume will develop some of them.

Nor is there any attempt on my part to claim that research and experience have no part in the ministry of the Biblical writers. Here

again, however, we must learn to be more modest in our assertions, and more in harmony with what has been revealed. There is unquestionably a human dimension to the task of the prophets and the apostles, and research and experience were part of it. At the same time, as we noted in the case of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, even when research and experience came into the picture, revelation played an immense and final role in undergirding the testimony of the apostle.

We know much less than we tend to claim. Why can't we, like Christ and the apostles, accept the Biblical writings as God's Word, true and authoritative, except when God, revealing Himself and expressing Himself through the prophetic ministry, declares that earlier laws are no longer applicable? A fresh look at the Scriptures' self-attestations, and the inseparable relationship between revelation and inspiration to which both the Bible and Ellen White testify should prove helpful in addressing the difficulties Thompson refers to, and in establishing the authority of the totality of the Bible on a more solid foundation. The writer's suggestions deserve attention, beyond the scope of what I have done here. It seems to me that he needs to clarify things and to consider the urgings of those among us for whom the solutions he suggests to the difficulties we sometimes encounter when reading the Bible remain questionable.

Indeed, one of the most encouraging things about his work is Thompson's hope "that this book would help as a guide and as a spur to further study and discussion" (250:2). Personally, I would not hesitate to take this invitation seriously. As we do so, however, let us remember the following statement from the inspired pen:

God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible and the Bible only as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for us against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support (*The Great Controversy*, p. 595).

Endnotes

¹ See Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse*. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 2.

² Figures in parentheses refer to pages and full paragraphs.

REVELATION/INSPIRATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: A CRITIQUE OF ALDEN THOMPSON'S "INCARNATIONAL" MODEL

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Introduction

The issue of revelation/inspiration in the Old Testament has been recently addressed in two publications by a well-known Seventh-day Adventist professor, Alden Thompson. These two books are *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?*¹ and *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*.²

In a cordial, personal dialogue not long ago, I shared with the author my own pilgrimage concerning revelation/inspiration—a pilgrimage that has led me from a position very similar to his, to a far different approach to the Word.³ I specifically focused upon some of the problem passages of Scripture that Thompson indicates have been decisive in shaping his view of inspiration. I shared with him how I once held similar positions regarding most of these problematic passages, but how in the past few years I have found a growing body of evidence supporting interpretations that are more consistent with the Scripture's own claims about itself and more in harmony with Ellen White's portrayal of the doctrine of revelation/inspiration.

In this paper I will present some of the constructive evidence that I shared with Dr. Thompson. Before I do this, however, several preliminary methodological issues in his approach call for brief attention.

Methodological Matters

The Historical-Critical Method

First, it is crucial to compare our author's basic approach in his two books with the historical-critical method. In the accompanying chart (p. 107), adapted from my previous article in *JATS*,⁴ I have summarized the basic objective, underlying presuppositions, and resultant corollaries, of the historical-critical method as contrasted with an historical-biblical approach which rejects critical presuppositions.

Despite the author's attempt to avoid "inflammatory" language and to adopt "friendly" terminology to describe his position and method,⁵ it must be recognized that he embraces the objective, major presuppositions and resultant corollaries of the historical-critical method. The historical-critical method is explicitly affirmed in *Inspiration*, Appendix A,⁶ although in other places in the book the method is given the euphemism "analytical" as opposed to a "casual" reading—as if the only other alternative to the historical-critical method were a "casual" reading of Scripture.⁷ In Appendix A, purporting to survey the inspiration issue in Seventh-day Adventist history, the discussion climaxes in the "consensus" statement (framed largely by proponents of the historical-critical method among Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholars) at Consultation II in Washington, 1981.

What is shocking is that the author's survey ends with this Consultation II document, a statement which was never officially voted or approved by the church. On the other hand, the Methods of Bible Study Committee report—which explicitly rejected any use of the historical-critical method, and was voted by the 1986 Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro—is not even mentioned in the survey!⁸

Critical Objective. A comparison of our author's position with the objective, presuppositions and corollaries of the historical-critical method (compare with accompanying chart) shows that he has heartily endorsed the method and many of its conclusions.

A COMPARISON OF TWO METHODS

Historical-Critical Method**A. Definition**

The attempt to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of secular historical science.

B. Objective

To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is the human author's intention as understood by his contemporaries.

C. Basic Presuppositions

1. Secular norm: The principles and procedures of secular historical science constitute the external norm and proper method for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data.

2. Principle of criticism (methodological doubt): the autonomy of the human investigator to interrogate and evaluate on his own apart from the specific declarations of the biblical text.

3. Principle of analogy: present experience is the criterion of evaluating the probability of biblical events to have occurred, since all events are in principle similar.

4. Principle of correlation (or causation): a closed system of cause and effect with no room for the supernatural intervention of God in history.

D. Resultant Corollaries

1. Disunity of Scripture, since its production involved many human authors or redactors; Scripture therefore cannot be compared with Scripture ("proof-texts") to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.

2. "Time-conditioned" or "culturally-conditioned" nature of Scripture; the historical context is responsible for the production of Scripture.

3. The human and divine elements of Scripture must be distinguished and separated: the Bible contains but does not equal the Word of God.

Historical-Biblical Approach**A. Definition**

The attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data by means of methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.

B. Objective

To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is what God intended to communicate, whether or not it is fully known by the human author or his contemporaries (1 Peter 1:10-12).

C. Basic Presuppositions

1. Sola Scriptura: The authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation (Isa 8:20).

2. The Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism: biblical data are accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm to determine truthfulness, adequacy, intelligibility, etc. (Isa 8:20).

3. Suspension of the compelling principles of analogy to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture and in the process of the formation of Scripture (2 Peter 1:19-21).

4. Suspension of the principle of correlation (or natural cause and effect) to allow for the divine intervention in history as described in Scripture (Heb 1).

D. Resultant Corollaries

1. Unity of Scripture, since the many human authors are superintended by one divine author; therefore Scripture can be compared with Scripture to arrive at biblical doctrine (Luke 24:27; 1 Cor 2:13).

2. Timeless nature of Scripture: God speaks through the prophet to a specific culture, yet the message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth (John 10:35).

3. The divine and human elements in Scripture cannot be distinguished or separated: the Bible equals the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

Regarding the objective of the historical-critical method, he vigorously supports the position that the correct meaning of Scripture is what the human author intended as understood by his contemporaries. Thus the interpretation of Scriptural passages by later biblical writers cannot be depended upon as reliable or faithful to the original context.⁹

Although the author claims to have escaped the grip of the Enlightenment with his "practical" approach, the Enlightenment principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation are still very much in place. Scripture is a casebook, with reason in the throne (albeit "spiritual" reason) to decide which case should apply today and which is time-and-culture-bound and to be discarded.¹⁰ Thus the ultimate authority is not Scripture but man's autonomous reason.

Principle of Criticism. The principle of criticism—which is at the heart of the historical-critical method, is also at the heart of the "incarnational" model. This means the autonomy of the human investigator to interrogate and evaluate the biblical data and to make a judgment on his own apart from the specific declarations of the text. Thus, for example, the law of clean and unclean meats is judged as no longer a binding law for Christians, but simply a basic health principle along with all the other health principles. Our author declares, "I would choose—if necessary—whole-wheat crackers made with lard over rotten carrots, over rare beefsteak, and possibly over a piece of pecan pie."¹¹

Principle of Analogy. The principle of analogy leads our author to posit that present experience is the criterion of evaluating the probability of biblical events to have occurred. Though he does allow for miracles, yet with regard to the Flood, (presumably since world-wide floods are no longer occurring) he sees no reason to insist on its world-wide extent, and strongly hints at its mere localized character.¹² Creation likewise is affirmed in principle, but no importance is attached to the date: "I believe it wise to keep the questions of the age of the earth and the fact of Creation separate."¹³ It is crucial to point out in this regard that if one accepts only a local Flood, then one is obliged to explain the geological column in terms of long ages and theistic evolution or something similar.

Principle of Correlation (Causation). Closely related to the

principle of analogy is the principle of correlation (causation), which sees a closed system of cause and effect with little or no room for supernatural intervention in history. While our author does allow for supernatural activity at points (as do many of the most radical proponents of the historical-critical method, if it is reasonable to do so [=principle of contingency]), he argues for purely natural explanations of how the Scriptures came into being. With the caveat that God guided the process, he still argues for extensive editing and "molding" and "shaping" of the material, despite clear statements in a given book of the Bible to the contrary.¹⁴

Higher-critical Corollaries. 1. Disunity. The resultant corollaries of applying the three major principles of the historical-critical method come dramatically to the fore in this book. The basic unity of Scripture (which the author calls "the traditional theoretical model of the unity of Scripture")¹⁵ is exploded. Contradictions, errors, discrepancies—historical, scientific, even theological—are freely admitted (though he euphemistically labels all of these as "differences").

The only unity left to Scripture is a motivational one: none of the writers intended to deceive, and they all have the same goal of winning over the reader/hearer to the law of love. With this position, it becomes virtually impossible to maintain the validity of comparing Scripture with Scripture to arrive at correct doctrine. This is in stark contrast to the example of Jesus with the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:27).

Furthermore, later inspired interpretations of earlier Scriptural passages are viewed as unreliable, often contradicting, or at least garbling the original meaning of the passage that is being interpreted. The explanation of how this can happen is found in the next corollary to the historical-critical method.

2. Culturally-conditioned. The time-bound, culturally-conditioned nature of Scripture plays a major role in the books by our author. The New Testament writers are said to use rabbinic, midrashic methods in interpreting the Old Testament, thereby distorting the original meaning of the text.¹⁶ But our author hastens to add that the New Testament writers can be excused—in fact the Spirit guided in this—since these were the methods of Bible interpretation culturally in vogue at the time.

Based upon this corollary of the historical-critical method, our author relativizes major aspects of the Scripture. For example, he asserts that the author of Hebrews interprets the Sanctuary in terms of Platonic dualism.¹⁷ The original sanctuary in the wilderness was not really constructed as a copy of the heavenly original (as indicated in Exod. 25:40), but simply borrowed common ideas of what a temple should look like.¹⁸ There are conflicting pictures of Satan in the Old Testament; Job's account is regarded as coming into view by Israel only very late; the references in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 do not refer to Satan.¹⁹

The various "strange" laws in the Old Testament were culturally conditioned; God simply treated Israel according to the prevailing cultural norms of justice. Even capital punishment and the destruction of the Canaanites, were not the divine ideal of justice, but cultural accommodation to Israelite misconceptions. Many of these laws are even contradictory with each other in the Old Testament, or else they are changed, abolished, and reinstituted as the cultural setting demanded.²⁰

In the New Testament Paul's counsel on women was simply reflecting the culture of the day; even his theological argument grounded in Creation and the Fall, were Paul's logic, not God's—rabbinic midrash which was in vogue at the time.²¹

3. Human distinguished from the divine. As a final corollary of the historical-critical method, our author implicitly insists that although all of Scripture is "inspired," the human and divine elements of Scripture must be distinguished and separated: the Bible *contains* but does not *equal* the Word of God.

Thus, the imprecatory or cursing psalms (such as Psalms 69 and 109) are viewed as purely human outbursts of hatred, totally opposed to the Christian ethic of love for one's enemies. The so-called psalms of innocence (such as Psalms 26 and 41) are human self-justifications, which stand in conflict with Jesus' counsel to confess one's sins. The prayer of Godforsakenness in Psalm 22 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?") is opposed to a life of faith. The author exclaims: "Godforsakenness? May I put it behind me forever!"²² Despite the fact that New Testament writers quote these very psalms as authoritative, even predictive, our author sees

them as the human element of Scripture, contrary to God's ultimate divine Word on these subjects.²³

In a previous paper published in *JATS*, I have described how, in my own personal experience, I came to realize the incompatibility of the historical-critical method with the Scripture's own claims. In that issue I set out deductively the biblical reasons why I arrived at this conclusion. I will not repeat that evidence here, but refer the reader to that presentation.²⁴

The "Incarnational" Model of Inspiration

A Syllogistic Foundation. A second preliminary methodological issue in our author's approach focuses upon the basis of his so-called "incarnational" model of inspiration. The "incarnational" model builds upon a syllogism (alluded to many times by him):

Major Premise: Just as the living Word (Jesus) was human as well as divine, so the written Word (Scripture) is human as well as divine.

Minor Premise: Everything human is imperfect.

Conclusion: Therefore Scripture is imperfect, that is, fallible.

In order to demonstrate the fallible nature of this human imperfection of Scripture, the author surveys various problem areas of Scripture, pointing out what he sees as historical, scientific, exegetical or theological contradictions, errors, or inconsistencies. Based upon this inductive survey of problematic passages, his model of inspiration is formulated.²⁵

In this model, all the Bible writers/editors are equally inspired by the Holy Spirit. But they have different abilities and capacities and cultural biases. They may be compared to two stacks of wood, one dry, one soggy.

One will burn bright, clear, and hot. The other will burn reluctantly, with much wheezing and a great deal of smoke. Both are burning, both have been lit by the same match, but the difference in the quality of the raw material makes a great deal of difference in the fire. . . . So it is with God's inspired men. The same spirit kindles them all; some

will burn more brightly than others, but the Lord can work through them all. We might be inclined to blame the match for the poor fire. Any fault, however, lies not in the match, but in the soggy wood. And surprisingly, in spite of soggy wood, anyone who so desires can be properly warmed even by that smokey fire.²⁶

As a result of our author's inductive survey of the human imperfections of the Bible writers, he finds that the "smokey fires" of Scripture may include distorted presentations of theology, science, history, or interpretation of previous inspired writings.

Questionable Syllogism. Before we examine the "problem passages" used to illustrate and elaborate this incarnational syllogism, we must first consider the veracity of the syllogism itself. We can agree with the first two premises—the Bible is human as well as divine, and everything human is imperfect. These premises are both paraphrases from Ellen G. White's comments on inspiration.²⁷

The problem comes with the meaning of the word "imperfect." In the context of *Selected Messages*, 1:20, which our author quotes, "imperfect" does not mean fallible, as he seems to imply. After quoting *Selected Messages*, 1:20, "Everything that is human is imperfect," he adds, "Thus 'God and Heaven alone are infallible.'"²⁸ The implication is that Scripture, with its human element, is not infallible.

This misreading of the phrase, however, contradicts her unequivocal statement in *Selected Messages*, 1:416: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible." Ellen White equates Scripture with infallibility.

In *Selected Messages*, 1:20, Ellen White is clear regarding the meaning of "imperfect." It simply means "finite."

The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.

Ellen White is not talking about the fallibility of Scripture, any more than she is implying sinfulness in the "imperfect" humanity of Jesus.

Her meaning is amplified in a statement of 1901 recorded two pages later in *Selected Messages*, 1:22:

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory.²⁹

Imperfection here does not refer to the fallible smokey fire of lesser qualified or immature Bible writers. It refers to the impossibility of infinite ideas being adequately conveyed even by the most expressive finite vehicles of thought.

The Use of Ellen G. White Writings

True Position Shifted. The foregoing discussion leads us to a third preliminary issue in our author's methodology: the employment of Ellen G. White quotations to support his views. He repeatedly mentions how her views of inspiration have molded his own. Yet it is frustrating to see repeatedly his commentary on quotations from her works making her say something she does not really say. In fact an analysis of his line of argument reveals that with each succeeding step Ellen White's position is slightly shifted, until in his conclusion our author has her affirming virtually the opposite of her real position! This is especially true concerning her statements dealing with the "human" aspect of Scripture. Let us note some examples.

When *Great Controversy*, vi-vii is cited: "The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language" it is taken to imply various distortions of the divine message on the part of the human author.³⁰ We have just seen, however, that Ellen White was speaking of the finitude of human speech and not the Bible writers' distortions. Again, Ellen White's counsel about not

moving too quickly in health reform is misapplied by the author to caution Bible teachers not to move too quickly in reforming their students' views of inspiration.³¹

The author quotes *Testimonies to Ministers*, 106-107, which counsels Bible students regarding "weighing evidence" in Scripture, but the implication drawn is the pitting of one Scripture against another³²—a meaning totally foreign to Ellen White's emphasis upon weighing the biblical evidence to see if a new view presented by men is true.

As another example, he cites Manuscript 24, 1892, which discusses disagreement among church members over the interpretation of certain passages. His commentary mistakenly suggests that this applies to disagreement among inspired writers regarding the meaning of Scripture.³³ Again, he cites *Testimonies*, 5:706-707, regarding healthy controversy and agitation and questions and differences of opinion, and applies this to the question of the authority of Scripture,³⁴ when in fact the thrust of the statement is the very opposite—to submit all of these questions to the ultimate authority of Scripture!

Statements Misinterpreted. Moreover, Ellen G. White's references to *apparent* contradictions and discrepancies (*Great Controversy*, viii) are taken to be *real* contradictions (though the term is avoided through more neutral, "friendly" terms, in a conscious strategy for acceptance).³⁵ The "underlying harmony" suggested by Ellen White is reinterpreted to be only a "motivational" harmony: they all have the same basic goal "winning over a wide variety of human beings to God's law of love."³⁶

By contrast, Ellen G. White insists that although different writers may approach a subject from different perspectives, they do so without contradiction (*Selected Messages*, 1:22). She clearly supports "the traditional theoretical model of the unity of Scripture" (the designation used by our author for the model he rejects)³⁷ and not his "practical," "motivational" model.

The whole tenor of our author's language describing a "dangerous middle ground;"³⁸ the need for many to "inch our way forward on the dangerous road" of discovering the humanity of Scripture; the caution to "pray for wisdom to close the book in time and to wait, if necessary"; to "keep a finger on your pulse; back

away if you feel you must,"³⁹ simply does not have any counterpart in the writings of Ellen G. White. Her understanding of Scripture does not describe any such dangerous middle ground. Scripture is fully authoritative, consistent, without contradiction. Later revelation is in full harmony with previous revelation. There is no progression from a naïve "authoritarian" view of inspiration to a mature principled approach (as our author suggests).⁴⁰

Creates Contradictions. Once more, our author makes what he considers "may be the most crucial point of the whole book: *the Bible does not say that all Scripture was given by revelation.*"⁴¹ He seeks to distinguish between "inspiration," which applies to all the Bible writers, and "revelation," which refers to places where the prophet specifically says "I saw," or "the word of the Lord came to me." But "revelation" does not necessarily include "historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles," where the writer makes no such explicit claim.⁴² This position flies in the face of Ellen White's explicitly broad conception of revelation that encompasses the entire Bible.⁴³

Finally, two specific statements of Ellen G. White on inspiration are misinterpreted: (1) "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired,"⁴⁴ and (2) the books of the Bible were written "by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and mental and spiritual endowments."⁴⁵ Neither of these statements teach what our author tries to make them say. In their original context, neither suggest that because the men and not the words are inspired, and because the men differ in mental and spiritual endowments, therefore the words they pen may be teaching error. Ellen G. White is clear that "thought inspiration" is superintended by God so that the writer chooses "appropriate" words, and the end product of written revelation is truth without contradiction, though, of course, not exhaustive truth.⁴⁶

"Problem Passages" of the Old Testament

Having briefly discussed preliminary issues, there remains, now, the underlying question of the inductive survey of problem passages that our author has undertaken. It is not enough for us to critique the historical-critical method, nor the "incarnational" model of inspiration, without dealing with the major areas of

Scripture that seem to call for and even demand the historical-critical method and the "incarnational" model. Can we really claim the infallibility of Scripture when there seems to be so much evidence of its fallibility?

In the book, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* Dr. Thompson sets forth the foundational inductive study upon which his later *Inspiration* volume is built. He organizes the problem passages in five major areas.⁴⁷ These include:

(1) The seemingly contradictory understandings of Satan in the Old Testament.

(2) The apparently harsh and disturbing laws of the Old Testament.

(3) God's condoning and even commanding of violence, genocide, and other acts of apparently gross injustice in the Old Testament.

(4) The apparent use of rabbinic methods by New Testament writers which seem to read back into Old Testament texts a meaning that is foreign to the original context, especially with regard to the so-called messianic passages.

(5) The Old Testament imprecatory (or "cursing") psalms in which an inspired writer seems to breathe vengeance upon his enemies, thus exhibiting an attitude clearly contrary to the Christian ideal.

Our author's inductive look at problem passages convinces him of the time-bound, culture-bound, human imperfection of Scripture. For him this requires the "incarnational," casebook approach to deal with these human elements in Scripture. The crucial point we can already make is this: *If our author's claim for the fallible nature of these passages is mistaken, in effect the whole basis for his "incarnational" model collapses.*

I would like to turn now to a brief look at the five major areas of Scripture which he sets forth to undergird his understanding of inspiration. In each of these five areas we will explore a growing body of evidence in scholarly research that supports a view of Scripture's infallibility, not its fallibility. We have no space for detailed exegesis of specific passages, but I will point the way toward a consistent interpretation of major issues, and suggest recent sources for further reading. For the sake of convenience we

will follow the order of discussion in the author's book, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?*

Satan in the Old Testament

First, we face the issue of the Old Testament understanding of Satan. It is claimed that the Old Testament gives a contradictory picture of Satan, and only later, in postexilic times, does a specific demonic being named Satan appear. It is asserted that 1 Samuel 24:1 contradicts the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 21:1. In the former passage God incites David to number Israel, while in the latter, it is Satan who incites David. The author writes: "Whereas the earlier author was still operating with the view that the Lord is the *active* cause of everything, the later writer sees evil events happening with the *permission* of the Lord."⁴⁸

However, these two parallel passages actually provide complimentary, not contradictory accounts of the same story. Just as Genesis 1-2 give a balanced picture of God as both Elohim and Yahweh (both transcendent and personal), so the Samuel and Chronicles accounts give us a balanced picture of the sovereignty of God, even over the evil that happens, while maintaining that Satan is the active agent in the evil.

It is true that the role of Satan is not strongly emphasized in Scripture before the time of the Babylonian Exile, while polytheism is rampant in the ancient Near East. An emphasis upon Satan during this time would have been too easily misunderstood as a rival god to Yahweh. But this is not to say that the knowledge of Satan was nonexistent until postexilic times.

Job and Pentateuchal References. Already in the book of Job, which was written by Moses in the wilderness of Midian,⁴⁹ clear reference is made to Satan as a personal being (Job 1-2). The prologue to Job plainly exhibits the balance between the sovereignty of God and His permissive will with regard to the acts of Satan in the setting of the Great Controversy. And a close reading of Genesis 3:15 (the Protoevangelium, or first Gospel Promise) shows that the serpent is not just a mere snake. The literary structure of the verse, the trial setting—involving moral accountability, the promise of the lasting moral conflict and existence of the original perpetrator of evil throughout succeeding generations,

culminating in a final personal struggle between him and the Messianic Seed—all point to the personal being who exists and who utilized the serpent as his medium.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the Day of Atonement ritual (Lev. 16) on a yearly basis, presented a specific encounter between two beings, Yahweh, and Azazel, the opponent of Yahweh.⁶¹

Isaiah 14/Ezekiel 28. In particular, we focus upon Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Our author, and most critical scholars, deny that these passages have anything to do with Satan in their original context. It is asserted that these views are borrowed largely from ancient Near Eastern mythology, and describe earthly, historical enemies of Israel, not a supernatural demonic being. When I was a proponent of the historical-critical method, I used to believe this way also.

Recently, a doctoral dissertation on these two passages has dealt a devastating blow to these critical assertions. Jose Bertoluci's 1985 Andrews University Ph.D. dissertation is entitled "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil." Bertoluci demonstrates that there is simply no close ancient Near Eastern parallels to either Isaiah 28 or Ezekiel 28. The few examples of parallel imagery occur in completely different contexts.

Bertoluci shows that the chiasmic literary structure of Isaiah 14 moves from the historical realm in the outer members of the chiasm to the heavenly, supernatural realm in the heart of the chiasmic structure. The language in this central section transcends any possible reference to any historical Assyrian or neo-Babylonian ruler. No ancient Near Eastern ruler makes the claims set forth in these verses. Further, the use of the term *mashal* or "parabolic dirge" in 14:3 to describe Isaiah's lament suggests that the king of Babylon is presented as a paradigm of the real, supernatural leader of the nation, Lucifer himself.⁶²

A similar situation is found in Ezekiel 28. My own structural analysis of Ezekiel reveals a chiasmic arrangement for the book as a whole, with the judgment upon the fallen cherub coming as the chiasmic apex of the book. The major theme of judgment in Ezekiel moves from the motif of investigative judgment/Day of Atonement for Israel in the outer members of the literary arrangement to the

judgment of foreign nations at the inner matching level. This inner section itself has an intricate chiastic arrangement.

In Ezekiel 28, the Lord first gives a message to the "prince" (*nagîd*) of Tyre, who is clearly the historical, ruling king. Then in vv. 11-12, the message shifts and is directed to the "king" (*melek*) of Tyre. Here, at the chiastic heart of the book, the language is no longer applicable to an earthly ruler, but clearly refers to the cosmic realm and a supernatural being who was covering cherub on the holy mountain of God.⁵³

The shift from earthly "prince" (*nagîd*) to the cosmic "king," who is the real ruler, is the same that we find in 1 Samuel 8-13. In the latter story God calls Saul the "prince" (*nagîd*) of Israel, and Himself the "king" of Israel.⁵⁴ The book of Ezekiel reflects this same shift when God calls Zedekiah the "prince" (*nasi*) of Judah (Ezekiel 12:10) and Himself the "king" (*melek*) of His people (Ezekiel 20:33). As was true with Israel—the earthly ruler is prince and the cosmic ruler is the true king—so with Israel's enemy. The earthly ruler of Tyre is the "prince," but the real ruler, the "king," is the Fallen Cherub. It is not without significance that God saves this message of judgment upon the perpetrator of all evil for the heart of the chiasm in Ezekiel's theology of judgment.

Bertolucci's dissertation and my own close reading have shown that Isaiah and Ezekiel knew of the existence of Satan. Satan's existence was not a late understanding for Israel and her prophets. The traditional interpretation of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 is founded on solid biblical evidence, and the picture portrayed in these chapters is fully consistent with the picture of Satan that emerges throughout Scripture.

Old Testament Laws

The second major area of problem passages brought up by our author is the mass of apparently harsh, disturbing, primitive, now-irrelevant laws in the Old Testament. He argues that there seem to be no criteria in Scripture for determining which laws are still binding and which are not. His suggestion, as we have already noted, is to adopt the casebook approach. There are eternal principles represented in the Law Pyramid (see G. F. Hasel, "Reflections on Alden Thompson's 'Law Pyramid'" in this volume), but all

specific applications involve cases conditioned by time and culture. The enlightened reason must decide which cases apply today.

Law of Clean/Unclean Flesh. A case in point is the law of clean-unclean meats. The author argues that this "casebook" law is no longer binding for those who are mature enough to think on the advanced level of general principles. The distinction between clean and unclean foods is simply a basic health principle along with all the others that Adventists uphold. A few years ago I also thought that it was illegitimate to separate the law of clean and unclean foods from the ceremonial laws of Leviticus. I felt that this law was no longer binding except as a general health principle. After all, I reasoned, Leviticus 11 is right at the start of a series of laws dealing with ritual uncleanness connected with the Old Testament sanctuary. How is it possible to accept Leviticus 11 as permanently binding and consider the other laws as dealing with temporary, ceremonial uncleanness?

As I have studied this subject in the last few years, in connection with my teaching of the Seminary class Covenant/Law/Sabbath, I have become convinced that God has not left this matter unclear. There are a number of crucial indicators in Scripture that the law of clean and unclean foods is in a class by itself in this portion of Leviticus, and that it is a universal law which is permanently binding.

Many of these lines of evidence are being brought together in another doctoral dissertation by Jiri Moskala, a Czechoslovakian Seventh-day Adventist scholar who has earned one doctorate from University of Prague, and is now finishing his second dissertation, this time for Andrews University. Many of these fresh insights that have emerged from his and other current investigations of this issue have been summarized in the recent *JATS* article by Gerhard Hasel.⁵⁶ I briefly mention seven major points from these studies and my own research.

Distinction in Antediluvian Age. The distinction between clean and unclean animals was in effect even before the Flood (Gen. 7:8; 8:20), and before the people of Israel and the sanctuary ever came into existence. It is true that these animals are not explicitly mentioned with regard to man's diet, but William Shea has shown that the mention of clean and unclean foods are placed in chiasmic

parallel with the description of man's diet in the Flood story.⁶⁶ Furthermore, when God allows man to eat flesh meat (Gen. 9:3-4), it is not "all" animals that are allowed, but every *remes*, which in Genesis 1:24 was but a small portion of the animals, probably referring to the smaller (clean) game animals.⁶⁷

Distinction Not Based on Ritual. It should be noted that the distinction between clean and unclean could not have been simply for ritual/ceremonial purposes, that is, to indicate which animals were clean and thereby proper for sacrifices. A look at the list in Leviticus 11 reveals many clean creatures—for example fish—that were unacceptable as sacrifices.

Perpetually Unclean. In the case of all the other kinds of uncleanness mentioned in Leviticus—leprosy, sexual defilement, touching dead carcasses, etc., there is provision for the unclean person or thing to be cleansed by certain rituals. But Moskala shows how the unclean foods stand in a class all by themselves. While the other unclean objects are only *temporarily* unclean, the unclean foods are *perpetually* unclean. There is no provision for making them clean.⁵⁸

Part of Universal Law. The clean and unclean food distinctions are mentioned in Leviticus 20:25, in the context of activities of *non-Israelites* that defile the land. Leviticus 18 mentions these same activities, and indicates that these practices caused the land to be defiled and to vomit out its inhabitants. Then God told Israel: If they practiced the same abominations, the land would vomit them out.

These practices, therefore, are not just destructive for Israel. They are universal abominations. Whoever practices them, Jew or Gentile, will suffer the natural consequences.⁶⁹ These are clearly universal laws that deal with items which are inherently defiling, applying to Gentiles and Jews, not just ceremonially defiling in connection with the sanctuary. The specific word for "abomination," (*tô'ebah*), used for these inherently defiling activities in Leviticus 18, is also used for the unclean meats in Deuteronomy 14:3.

Applied to Foreigners. In the laws of Leviticus 17, the distinction between clean and unclean foods is implied as pertaining to the stranger (*ger*) as well as to the Israelite, thus indicating its univer-

sal nature. The prohibition against eating blood states: "Any man also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird *that may be eaten* shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust" (Lev. 17:13). This obviously assumes a knowledge of what may and may not be eaten. And the regulation is the same for Israelite and the non-Israelite sojourner.

Defilement by Association: Nonbiblical. When we turn to the New Testament, we find that the distinction between clean and unclean has not been abolished. A penetrating study by Colin House⁶⁰ has shown that by intertestamental times the Jews had imbibed the nonbiblical idea of "defilement by association." They believed that if something clean touched something unclean, it would become common or defiled (Greek, *koinos*). House shows that Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others condemn this notion of defilement by association. Never do they argue that unclean foods are now clean, but rather that clean foods do not become "common" (*koinos*) by association with unclean. So in Mark 7 Jesus speaks to Jews who think that clean foods are defiled or made *koinos* by touching them with unwashed hands.⁶¹

Peter in Acts 10 sees the vision of the sheet full of all kinds of animals, both clean and unclean. When God says to Peter, "Rise, kill and eat" (v. 13), Peter answers "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (vs. 14). Peter felt he couldn't eat anything in the sheet, because even the clean things have been rendered defiled or common (*koinos*) by association with the unclean animals.

Most crucial is God's response. He does not say, "You must no longer call any animal *unclean*." He says, "What God has declared clean, you must not call *common* (*koinos*)" (v. 14). God never asks Peter to eat the unclean animals, but to stop calling *the clean animals* "*koinos*," defiled by their association with the unclean.⁶²

Some modern versions have mistakenly translated the word *koinos* as "*unclean*" in several New Testament passages, but it simply does not mean "*unclean*". For example, in Romans 14: 14, 20, Paul does not say that no foods are "*unclean*" (as the RSV translates; that would be another Greek word—*akathartos*). He says that no food is *koinos*, "*common*," defiled by association with

the unclean. Paul is thus rejecting the principle of defilement by association, not the law of clean and unclean foods.

The Holiness Rationale. Finally, Leviticus 11 gives the specific rationale for the clean and unclean distinction. God says it is to "be holy, for I am holy" (v. 44). Gerhard Hasel shows that this rationale is rooted in the "holy people" theme of Exodus 19:3-6, that it includes the notion of wholeness and wellness, and that it is continued in the New Testament description of the Christian believer, who will adhere to the same holiness lifestyle.⁶³ Thus, I have found that the New Testament writers are consistent with the Old Testament in maintaining the Levitical distinction between clean and unclean foods.

NT Consistent with OT. The consistency between the Testaments is not only with regard to this law, but also appears in connection with other laws as well. The New Testament writers seem well aware of criteria within the Old Testament itself that indicate which laws are universally binding. As a sample of this New Testament awareness and consistency with the Old Testament, we note the Jerusalem Council decision of Acts 15. Our author takes Acts 15 as an example of the New Testament church applying the casebook approach to the Old Testament laws.⁶⁴ In actual fact, however, if one compares the laws enjoined upon the Gentiles in Acts 15, he/she will find they are precisely the same laws as those explicitly forbidden the foreigner (*ger*) as well as the Israelite in Leviticus 17-18: idolatry, blood, what dies of itself, and immorality.

As I have taught the course, Covenant/Law/Sabbath, over the last decade at the Theological Seminary, I have rejoiced to see more clearly how God has given in the Old Testament Scriptures the indicators of which laws are universal and permanent and which are part of the temporary typological/ceremonial and theocratic/civil systems.

Book of Exodus Clarifies Law Issues. In the book of Exodus, as God successively reveals his laws to Israel, the basic paradigm for permanency in law is clarified. First comes the Decalogue or moral law (Exod. 20), spoken directly by God as the foundation of the covenant—both of the Old (Deut. 4:30) and of the New (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-13; 10:15-16). The Decalogue thus has no "statue of limitation."

Second, God gives Moses the *mishpatim*, or judgments (Exodus 21-24) which constituted the application of the Decalogue to the civil theocracy of Israel. This civil law is permanent in what it affirms, but the civil enforcement and punishments are possible only as long as the theocratic government would continue. Thus, it has a built-in "statute of limitation" tied to the continuance of the theocracy. Daniel 9:24 predicts the fall of the theocracy at the end of the 70 weeks, and the covenant lawsuit of Acts 7 finalizes the end of theocracy in A.D. 34.⁶⁵ Implied in this is the end of the civil enforcement of the theocratic law.

Third, God gives to Moses the plans regarding the building of the sanctuary (Exod. 25-40). Right at the outset of this cultic/ceremonial instruction, God indicates that the sanctuary is a *type* of the original heavenly sanctuary (Exod. 25:9, 40).⁶⁶ Thus from its inception the sanctuary/ritual laws are shown to be typological, pointing toward their antitype. (The Pentateuch reveals that the ceremonial law was only required for Israel, not for the stranger; unless he chose to participate, Num. 9:14; 15:14).

In Psalm 40:6-8, the preexistent Christ announces the end of the ceremonial/sacrificial system in His own death as the Antitype (see Heb. 10:1-10 for exegesis of Ps. 40). Likewise Daniel 9:27 indicates the end of the ceremonial law at the death of the Messiah. Therefore, the ceremonial law also had a built-in "statute of limitations." These ritual laws reached their fulfillment with the coming of the Antitype Jesus, who would carry out in *reality* on Calvary and in the heavenly sanctuary what had been foreshadowed in type in the ceremonial system.

Thus, already in the three-step giving of the law in the book of Exodus, God revealed the basic paradigm for the permanence of biblical law. The later laws recorded in Leviticus through Numbers may be classified under one of the three types of law set forth in Exodus: moral, civil, or ceremonial. In cases where there might be some question regarding the permanence of certain laws (such as the law of clean and unclean meats), God gave additional indicators within the text to make this point clear, as we have seen above.

In cases where God in his condescension has born with Israel's hardness of heart and not seen fit to completely abolish such institutions as slavery, he has clearly indicated "in the beginning"

(Gen. 1-3) His ideal, and the Mosaic legislation—revolutionary for its times—leads back toward the Edenic ideal. Jesus recognized this “from the beginning” criterion of permanence (Matt. 19:8).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into more detail on the subject of law. But we must conclude that there is no call in Scripture for the move from codebook to casebook, with the relevancy of cases to be determined ultimately by means of man’s autonomous enlightened reason.

God’s Condoning of Violence and Injustice

We move now to the third major area of problem passages used to support the so-called “incarnational” model of revelation/inspiration. This involves God’s condoning and even commanding violence, genocide, and other acts of apparently gross injustice. Our author lists a number of specifics, but we can take only a couple of examples.

Destruction of the Canaanites. One crucial illustration involves God’s command for Israel to utterly destroy the Canaanites. It is argued that it was not really God’s will to destroy these people, but that anything less would not have been considered just by the people of Israel. So God condescended to meet the people’s warped understanding of justice.

It is true that God condescends to meet His people where they are. But does this involve a distortion of truth in order to accommodate fallen humanity—even genocide to accommodate a false theology of justice? Or, in His condescension to meet man where he is, does God clearly uphold His law without compromise? And where He does condescend in matters that do not compromise the standard of His law, does He give the criteria to determine what is accommodation to faithless people and what was His original, better plan?

Was God Just to Order the Canaanite Destruction? Again, I have become increasingly convinced that God does not compromise truth even as He condescends to meet fallen man where is. With regard to the killing of Canaanites, there are two main issues. First, was God just in destroying the Canaanites, or is this a condescension to Israel’s false sense of justice? The answer becomes plain as we see God’s attitude toward individuals, cities, nations, and the whole world prior to the time of Israel’s entrance into Canaan.

With regard to the antediluvian world, God gave a time of probation, which, when unheeded, was followed by investigative and executive judgment. The same kind of judgment came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, upon Korah, Dathan and Abiram; it was likewise pronounced upon the Amalekites. Thus God's pattern of activity is indicated, throughout world history before the Conquest.

Already over 400 years before Israel's conquest of Canaan, God had told Abraham he could not yet possess the land of Canaan, because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." (Gen 15:16). God gave time for the inhabitants of Canaan to come to repentance, and there is evidence that He had his servants working to win the people of Canaan during that era.⁶⁷ At the time of the Conquest the iniquity of the Amorites was indeed full. The Ras Shamra tablets, dating from about this time at Ugarit, give us an insight into the gross licentiousness and violence that had become so pervasive that the most vile practices constituted the high point of their religious ritual.⁶⁸ A few generations of this debauchery, and the whole people were no longer capable of responding to the Spirit of God (cf. Gen 6:3). God in His mercy, as much as His justice, said "Enough! Judgment must come!"

The reading of the Ugaritic materials—the sex orgies at the place of worship—and the accounts of child sacrifice and worship of deities whose love of bloodshed knew no bounds—has convinced me of the justice (and mercy!) of God's destroying the Canaanites.

Israel as Executioners. But why command the people of Israel to do it? Is God asking Israel to break the sixth commandment? Did he desire for Israel to become insensitive to the value of human life by the mass killing? Again, a closer look at the text indicates that God's charge did not violate the precept against killing. The sixth commandment does not forbid all killing; it does not contain the general word for "kill," but a more limited word that refers primarily to murder and manslaughter and not capital punishment or divinely-commanded warfare.

God's original plan appears to have been that Israel need not lift a finger to kill any of their enemies. When they had enough faith, such as displayed at the shore of the Red Sea, God personally carried out the executive judgment upon the Egyptians (Exod. 14-15). At Sinai God promised that when Israel came to Canaan,

He would send His Angel and hornets before them to take care of the enemy inhabitants (Exod. 23:23, 28).

But with Israel's lack of faith, God condescended to meet them where they were, and to allow them to fight, promising to go with them and give them victory. But it appears that in Israel's later history, when there were great revivals of faith, God could again work directly in behalf of His people. For example, Jehoshaphat sent out the choirs ahead of his army, and God took care of the enemy without the soldiers ever lifting a weapon (2 Chr. 20). In response to Hezekiah's plea of faith, the angel of the Lord carried out the executive judgment on the Assyrian army (2 Kgs. 19; 2 Chr. 32; Isa. 37).

Thus, God's condescension is clear in Scripture, but not in such a way as to compromise the standard of His law, or to distort truth.

New Testament Distortion of Old Testament Passages

The fourth major area of problem passages involves this very issue of distortion of truth. I refer to the claim by our author and others that New Testament writers used the rabbinic methods current in their times in their interpretation of Old Testament scripture. This entailed reading back into the Old Testament passages a meaning that was foreign to the original meaning, thus distorting the message of Scripture. Perhaps the most notable example of this practice alleged by our author concerns the Messianic passages.

Higher-criticism's Approach. Critical scholars contend that the New Testament (Jesus and the apostles) takes the Old Testament passages out of their original context and imposes its own meaning upon them. It is insisted that the New Testament methods of interpreting these Old Testament passages are not legitimate exegesis, but rather constitute an allegorical, "Christological reapplication" based upon rabbinic methods.

I once was taught this position by proponents of the historical-critical method. As a "convert" to the historical-critical method, I accepted it and preached it myself. But in the process of writing my dissertation on the New Testament use of the Old Testament over a decade ago, I began to realize that the New Testament writers

were not taking Old Testament Scripture out of context. They were not reading back into the Old Testament what was originally not there. Rather, the New Testament writers were doing solid exegesis of the Old Testament using sound hermeneutical principles.

The Bible's Typological Approach. I have become increasingly aware that the New Testament Messianic interpretation of the Old Testament is often a typological one. Already in the Old Testament God pointed out which persons/events/institutions were typological. Thus the New Testament writers are simply announcing what the Old Testament already indicates. I have recently discussed this issue in detail elsewhere,⁶⁹ and I summarize with the accompanying chart (p. 129):

Horizontal column no. 3 ("David") shows the basis of Messianic typology in the Psalms. So, for example, Jesus and the Gospel writers cite Psalm 22 as being fulfilled in the various events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. But the Psalm does not cry out, "I am speaking of the Messiah!" The psalm is written by David in the first person, apparently describing David's own experience.

However, the middle vertical column in our chart points to a crucial key overlooked in most study of typology: the Old Testament provides verbal indicators which identify the types. With regard to Messianic typology in the Psalms, the later Old Testament prophets, under inspiration, predicted that the Messiah would come as the new, antitypical David, recapitulating in His life the experience of the old David. Thus the Davidic psalms relating to David's experience as the anointed one—namely, his suffering and his royal reign—are announced as types of the coming Davidic Messiah. In particular the angel Gabriel in Daniel 9:26, referring to the death of the Messiah, alludes to Psalm 22.⁷⁰ Thus, already in the Old Testament this Psalm is pointed out as the special psalm of the Messiah at his death.

The New Testament writers are not reading back into the Old Testament something that is not there. Rather, they announce the fulfillment of that which the prophets had predicted.

Nor are the New Testament writers engaged in rabbinic midrash of the Old Testament. In fact, a book just off the press by David Brewer may shatter the whole hypothesis of New Testament

**TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT:
IDENTIFYING THE TYPES**

Old Testament Type (Person/Event/Insti- tution)	Old Testament Verbal Indicator of Typology	New Testament Announcement of Antitype
1. Exodus: Book of Exodus; Hos 11:1; etc.	New Exodus⁷⁰ Hos 2:14-15; 12:9, 13; 13:4-5; Jer 23:4-8; 16:14-15; 31:32; Isa 11:15-16; 35; 40:3-5; 41:17-20; 42:14-16; 43:1-3, 14-21; 48:20- 21; 49:8-12; 51:9-11; 52:3-6, 11-12; 55:12- 13	Antitypical Exodus⁷¹ Matt 1-5; Luke 9:31; etc.
2. Sanctuary Exodus 25-40	Heavenly Original⁷² Exod 25:40; Ps 11:4; 18:6, 60:8; 63:2; 68:35; 96:6; 102:19; 150:1; Isa 6; Jonah 2:7; Mic 1:2; Hab 2:20; etc.	Heavenly Original Heb 8:5; 9:24; Rev 8:1-5; 11:19; 16:1; etc.
3. David The Psalms (e.g. Ps 22)	New David Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23; 37:24; Isa 9:5, 6; 11:1-5; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11; Zech 8:3; Dan 9:26; etc.	Antitypical David John 19:24, etc.
4. Jonah The Book of Jonah	New Jonah Hos 6:1-3 (= Israel); Isa 41-53 (Messiah represents and recapitulates experience of Israel: Isa 41:8; 42:1; 44:1; 49:3-6; 52:13-53:11; etc.)	Antitypical Jonah Matt 12:40; etc.
5. Elijah 1 Kgs 17-19	New Elijah Mal 4:5, 6	Antitypical Elijah Matt 11:14; Mark 9:11; Luke 1:17
6. Moses Pentateuch	New Moses Deut 18:15-19	Antitypical Moses John 1:21; 6:14; 8:40; etc.

writers using rabbinic allegory or midrash.⁷⁴ The author shows that before A.D. 70, the allegorical, midrashic method was not used by the rabbis in Palestine, and thus could hardly be borrowed by the New Testament writers. I quote from a pre-publication summary of the book:

This survey of Jewish exegesis during the era of Herod's Temple comes to some startling conclusions about the techniques and assumptions used by these early exegetes. The scribal predecessors of the rabbis in Palestine did not use allegory, did not ignore the context and did not read the text differently to suit their interpretation. However, Jewish interpreters in Alexandria, Qumran, and Rabbis after 70 CE did all these things.

The Imprecatory Psalms

The final major area of problem passages brought up by our author is found in the last chapter of his *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* The subject is the imprecatory (or cursing) psalms. While I was actively supporting the historical-critical method, I held to a similar view of these psalms. I saw the psalmist as breathing out vengeance upon his enemies, exhibiting a sub-Christian attitude out of harmony with Christ's command to "Love your enemies."

I now am convinced that my former understanding of the imprecatory psalms is erroneous. To delve into the whole subject in depth would require a lengthy article on its own. There are excellent scholarly treatments of the imprecatory psalms which maintain that the theology of these psalms are consistent with the rest of Scripture.⁷⁶ In my Seminary class on the Psalms we spend a whole week on the imprecatory psalms. I give some fifteen biblical principles that provide an inspired basis for interpreting and applying these psalms.

Some of the most salient of these points are summarized by John Stott:

As for the imprecatory psalms, in them the psalmist speaks not with any personal animosity but as a representative of God's chosen people Israel, regards the wicked as the enemies of God, counts them his own enemies only because he has completely identified himself with the cause of God, hates them because he loves God, and is so confident that this 'hatred' is 'perfect hatred' that he calls upon God

in the next breath to search him and know his heart, to try him and know his thoughts, in order to see if there is any wickedness in him [Ps. 139:19-24]. That we cannot easily aspire to this is an indication not of our spirituality but of our lack of it, not of our superior love for men but of our inferior love for God, indeed of our inability to hate the wicked with hatred that is 'perfect' and not 'personal'.

The truth is that evil men should be the object simultaneously of our 'love' and of our 'hatred', as they are simultaneously the objects of God's (although his 'hatred' is expressed as his 'wrath'). To 'love' them is ardently to desire that they will repent and believe, and so be saved. To 'hate' them is to desire with equal ardour that, if they stubbornly refuse to repent and believe, they will incur God's judgment. Have you never prayed for the salvation of wicked men (e.g., who blaspheme God or exploit their fellow humans for profit as if they were animals), and gone on to pray that if they refuse God's salvation, then God's judgment will fall upon them? I have. It is a natural expression of our belief in God, that he is the God both of salvation and of judgment, and that we desire his perfect will to be done.

So there is such a thing as perfect hatred, just as there is such a thing as righteous anger. But it is a hatred for *God's* enemies, not our own enemies. It is entirely free of all spite, rancour and vindictiveness, and is fired only by love for God's honour and glory. It finds expression now in the prayer of the martyrs who have been killed for the word of God and for their witness [Rev. 6:10]. And it will be expressed on the last day by the whole company of God's redeemed people who, seeing God's judgment come upon the wicked, will concur in its perfect justice and will say in unison, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just... Amen. Hallelujah!' [Rev. 19:1,3,4]⁷⁸

Conclusion

We have now completed our survey of the five major inductive pillars supporting the superstructure of the "incarnational" model of inspiration. We have seen that each of the pillars is structurally unsound. The so-called problem passages of the Bible simply do not require the adoption of a model that presents the Bible as a fallible, time-and-culture-bound casebook.

To those who hold such a model, I do not offer a scathing imprecation. After all, I was there myself not long ago. Rather, I

appeal to my colleagues who may feel constrained to similar positions: consider moving away from a model that is built upon the shaky foundation of a subjective, inductive, phenomenological appraisal of problem passages. Join the thousands of scholars through the centuries that have deductively listened to the Scripture's own attestations about itself. Rediscover the platform they have found—the truly biblical “incarnational” model of an infallible, fully authoritative, fully trustworthy Word of God, spoken in the language of the human authors, yet without contradiction or distortion of truth.

All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and *trembles at my word* (Isa. 66:2).

Endnotes

1 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989. Hereafter cited as *Who's Afraid*.

2 Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991. Hereafter cited as *Inspiration*.

3 See the summary of my hermeneutical pilgrimage in “The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage,” *JATS* 1/1 (1990): pp. 39-56.

4 The chart is adapted from *ibid.*, 43-44; the remainder of the article, pp. 45-56, discusses each of the points in the chart.

5 *Inspiration*, pp. 144-145, 249-250.

6 “The Inspiration Issue in Adventist History,” *ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 247-248, 285.

8 See *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987, pp. 18-20, for the Methods of Bible Study Report. Note especially the clear rejection of the historical-critical method in the Preamble: “In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.”

9 *Inspiration*, p. 206-208, etc.

10 See *ibid.*, pp. 98-131; note esp. 109, 111-112.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229, 247-248; “the fact of the Flood is more important than its extent,” p. 248.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 229.

14 This involves taking the few instances where the record clearly indicates editorial work (with Proverbs and Jeremiah) and extrapolating from this a process that is imposed upon other biblical materials where no such process is described or possible if the claims of Scripture are taken seriously. See *Inspiration*, pp. 163-172.

15 Ibid., p. 142.

16 Ibid., p. 208.

17 Ibid., p. 202.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., pp. 180-183; *Who's Afraid*, pp. 43-70.

20 *Who's Afraid*, pp. 71-90; *Inspiration*, pp. 123-126, 147-150).

21 Ibid., p. 98.

22 Ibid., p. 153; cf. 151-153 for discussion of these psalms; cf. *Who's Afraid*, pp. 158-168, for more elaborate discussion of the imprecatory psalms.

23 Of course our author claims God is "speaking" even here, in that He shows how He is willing to use for His messengers even "violent men who claim to be innocent and godforsaken," *Inspiration*, p. 153. God is revealing the need for openness and trust in our prayers, giving us comfort that His messengers were fallible men like us.

24 Davidson, "Authority of Scripture," pp. 39-56.

25 See *Inspiration*, p. 88, for explicit statement of this methodology: "On the human side, any theory of Scripture must be developed on the basis of what we *actually* find in Scripture rather than on what we *want* to find." Cf. *ibid.*, 145: "The illustrations found in Part III [problem passages] have led me to the suggestions developed in Part II ['incarnational' model of inspiration]."

26 *Who's Afraid*, pp. 161-162.

27 *Great Controversy*, p. viii; *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

28 *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 37. Cited in *Inspiration*, p. 261.

29 Letter 121, 1901.

30 *Inspiration*, p. 87.

31 Ibid., pp. 41, 165. The quotation is from *Testimonies*, 3:20, 21.

32 Ibid., p. 106.

33 Ibid., p. 212.

34 Ibid., p. 258.

35 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

36 Ibid., pp. 106, 142.

37 Ibid., p. 142.

38 Ibid., p. 312.

39 Ibid., p. 166.

40 Ibid., p. 114.

41 Ibid., p. 48 (emphasis his).

42 Ibid., p. 49; cf. full discussion, pp. 47-57.

43 See *Great Controversy*, p. v: "During the first twenty-five hundred years of human history, there was no written revelation. . . . The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses. Inspired revelations were then embodied in an inspired book. This work continued during the long period of sixteen hundred years, from Moses, the historian of creation and the law, to John, the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel." Again, *Testimonies*, 5:700: "The more he searches the Bible, the deeper is his conviction that it is the word of the living God, and human reason bows before the majesty of divine revelation." Cf. *Testimonies*, 4:9-10, which applies revelation-inspiration specifically to historical passages—"Bible biographies": "From Adam down through successive generations to the times of the apostles, we have a plain, unvarnished account of what actually occurred, and the genuine experience of real characters. . . . The inspired writers did not testify to falsehoods . . . The scribes of God wrote as they were

dictated by the Holy Spirit having no control of the work themselves. They penned the literal truth, and stern forbidding facts are revealed for reasons that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend. . . . It is a proven fact that it is a human impossibility to give an impartial history of a contemporary . . . The human mind is so subject to prejudice that it is almost impossible for it to treat the subject impartially. . . . But divine unction, lifted above the weakness of humanity, tells the simple, naked truth." See also *Testimonies* 5:241, 8:279-280; *Steps to Christ*, p. 93; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:964, etc.

44 *Selected Messages*, 1:21.

45 *Great Controversy*, p. vi.

46 See *Selected Messages*, 3:51-52; *Selected Messages*, 1:22.

47 At the conclusion of *Who's Afraid*, pp. 161-163, our author gives a brief statement of his views on inspiration that have emerged from his inductive survey. In *Inspiration*, he fleshes out his views on inspiration again, based upon his inductive study of problem passages (see *Inspiration*, p. 145). The volume *Inspiration* gives additional specific illustrations of problem passages: most of these may be subsumed under one of these five categories. (See also the treatment of further problem passages in other occasional papers in this volume.)

48 *Who's Afraid*, p. 51.

49 See *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 493-494, for evidence of this early date, rather than a very late as claimed by most critical scholars.

50 See Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 77-79; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), pp. 93-103.

51 See Angel Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), pp. 112-120; Gerhard Hasel, "Studies in Biblical Atonement II: The Day of Atonement," in eds. Arnold Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshar, *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), pp. 120-133.

52 See Bertolucci, *passim*, for substantiation and elaboration of all these points. Numerous evangelical scholars have come to the same conclusion. See, e.g. Gleason Archer, Jr., *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 268-270.

53 Despite the RSV attempts to alter the translation to "With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you"; the RSV margin reads "Heb. uncertain," but there is no difficulty in the Hebrew text, and no manuscript evidence for the RSV rendering.

54 See in particular 1 Sam. 8:7; 9:16; 10:1; 13:14.

55 Gerhard Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats in Lev 11: Still Relevant?" *JATS* 2/2 (1991):91-125.

56 See William Shea, "The Structure of the Genesis Flood Narrative and Its Implications," *Origins* 6 (1979):22.

57 See William White, "remeš," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, et al. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:850-851.

58 See Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats," pp. 93-96, for more detailed discussion.

59 See *ibid*, pp. 102-105, and my discussion of these universal laws in *Flame of Yahweh: The Theology of Sexuality in the Old Testament*, forthcoming.

60 Colin House, "Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of *koinos* in Acts 10-11," *AUSS* 21 (1983): 143-153.

61 See Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats," pp. 111-114, for discussion of Mark 7, and Jesus' alleged cleansing of all foods in this passage.

62 The notion of defilement by association is explicitly indicated in Peter's description of current Jewish thinking: "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean." (v. 28). Peter learns the lesson that biblically the non-Jews have never been called unclean, and Peter is certainly not defiled by association with them.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 115-118.

64 *Inspiration*, pp. 147-150.

65 See William Shea, "The Prophecy of Dan. 9:24-27," in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 80-82.

66 See my doctoral dissertation, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), pp. 367-388.

67 See the story of Melchizedek "priest of God Most Holy" in the center of Palestine (Gen. 14:17-20), and the account of the prophet Balaam (Num. 22-24).

68 See e.g., John Gray, *Legacy of Canaan, Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements, vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 98-103, and the discussion in chapter 5 of my forthcoming book, *Flame of Yahweh*. Cf. Archer, pp. 156-159.

69 See Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," in *Symposium on Revelation, Book 1, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, Vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 106, 128; the accompanying chart is expanded from this article.

70 See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), esp. pp. 75-133.

71 See George Balentine, "The Concept of the New Exodus in the Gospels," (Th.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1961); cf. *idem*, "Death of Christ as a New Exodus," *Review and Expositor* 59 (1962): 27-41.

72 See Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, pp. 367-388; *idem*, *Issues in Hebrews*, pp. 156-169.

73 See the discussion of this by Jacques Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9: An Exegetical Study," *AUSS* 17 (1979): 18-19.

74 David I. Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991).

76 For general treatments, see especially Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), pp. 19-23; Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms," *PTR* 1 (1903): 537-553; reprinted in Walter Kaiser, compiler, *Classical Evangelical Essays* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), pp. 113-132; on Ps. 137, cf. Howard Osgood, "Dashing the Little Ones Against the Rock," *PTR* 1 (1903): 23-37.

76 John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1978), pp. 116-117.

REFLECTIONS ON ALDEN THOMPSON'S "LAW PYRAMID" WITHIN A CASEBOOK/ CODEBOOK DICHOTOMY

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Introduction

The meaning and importance of biblical law is a subject of significant investigation and ongoing controversy in the Christian community.¹ There is an intensive debate about its purpose and function in modern biblical studies as well as in systematic theology.²

It should be no surprise that the discussion of the role and function of biblical law—its place in the believer's life, its validity for all times and in all places, its binding obligation for human beings everywhere, its various forms (universal/moral law, national/civil law, dietary/health law, and ceremonial/cultic law) and the nature of its permanence—continues in Christian circles and is now also part of the debate in Adventism. Recently, Alden Thompson has made some proposals on this subject in his book, *Inspiration: Hard Questions and Honest Answers*.³

Our investigation of law in the Bible cannot be exhaustive.⁴ We will investigate certain aspects as they relate to questions raised by the author's view of law within his proposed "law pyramid" and his dichotomy of "codebook" and "casebook." We are encouraged

to do so by his expressed hope "that this book would help as a guide and as a spur of further study and discussion" (p. 250).

Antinomianism in Christianity

It is inevitable that our study should begin with the continuing issue of antinomianism in Christian circles. Antinomianism is a word derived from the Greek words *anti*, "against," and *nomos*, "law," meaning that Christians do not need to preach and/or obey the law.⁶

Reformation Controversy

Antinomianism reached a high point in a controversy between Martin Luther (and Melanchthon) and his former student Johann Agricola. Agricola claimed that the Ten Commandments, the moral law had "no relevance for the Christian."⁶ Luther, and particularly Melanchthon, declared that the moral law was required to produce conviction of sin and repentance. In this debate Luther coined the term "antinomianism" in his work, *Against the Antinomians* (1539). In the treatise Luther held largely to a negative view of the law, having its role in preparing "sinners for grace by making them aware of their sin."⁷

In the Formula of Concord (1577) a new generation of Lutherans defined the distinction between law and gospel, maintaining that it was necessary to preach the law in the Christian community. The threefold usage of the law was thus outlined: (1) The law is to reveal sin, (2) it is to establish general decency in society, and (3) it is to provide a rule of life for those who are converted through faith in Christ. It is generally argued that Luther supported the first two usages of the law but not the third, even though Luther was not always consistent.

English Puritanism

There was an antinomian strain in English Puritanism. Some of the Puritans (Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh) maintained that the law had a pedagogic purpose, leading to a conviction of sin and thus to Christ; but they also held that the moral law had no place for the believer.⁸ In general, however, Puritans supported the valid-

ity of the moral law, the Ten Commandments, as binding for the believer.⁹

Dispensationalism

In the first part of the last century the Plymouth Brethren under the leadership of John Darby developed dispensationalism. This theological system puts a wedge between the Old and New Testaments. The "Dispensation of Law" is the Old Testament period which is followed by the "Dispensation of Grace," the period of the Christian Church. In the "Dispensation of Law" people were saved by keeping the law. This is no longer required, however, in the new "Dispensation of Grace," because the believer is now saved by grace.¹⁰ This antinomian strain in dispensationalism is well known.

A Current Issue

Antinomianism is by no means dead today. The continuing debate about law and grace, the meaning of righteousness by faith, the distinction between perfection and perfectionism, and the intense new scholarly controversy about the New Testament understanding of law highlight the issue of the meaning of the law in salvation and the life of the believer.

Let me quote a statement from an recent article published in a dictionary of theology: "Antinomianism clearly goes back to the time of the NT. Paul refutes the suggestion that the doctrine of justification by faith alone leaves room for persistence in sin, and frequently in the NT epistles the view that the Gospel condones licentiousness is forthrightly condemned. Such counterattacks make it evident that antinomian views were current in the apostolic age."¹¹

Evidently antinomianism is still present in our own age. Does it manifest itself even in some Adventist circles in blatant or in subtle forms? To this matter we will return later.

The "Casebook"/"Codebook" Concepts

Our author has created concern among some readers with his book, *Inspiration*, and the various controversial ideas it contains. We will not attempt to describe his entire methodology, his concepts

of revelation and inspiration, his emphasis on the human nature of Scripture, his own "incarnational model," which is tilting rather one-sidedly to the human element, his concept of inspiration based on the "difficulties" (viz. errors, contradictions, etc.) of the Bible, his use (or misuse!) of Ellen G. White, or his strange explanations of some perceived problems in the Bible which, in fact, are the basis of his entire position on inspiration. Other papers in this volume will address many of these matters. Our attempt will be to investigate, understand, and evaluate the "law pyramid" concept based on the author's "codebook/casebook" dichotomy and its impact on the authority of biblical law.

Area of Moral Law

Let us investigate in this section the idea of law in the Bible in terms of the suggested "codebook/casebook" dichotomy. The title of the crucial chapter in the book is, "God's Law: The One, the Two, the Ten, the Many".¹²

Our author is "tempted to argue that one of the unique Adventist contributions to the Christian world may be our understanding of law."¹³ This is very suggestive, indeed. We believe as well that Adventists have a golden opportunity to show a correct biblical view of law, but it must be one which is based on the entire Scripture in its own context.

The topic "law" is indeed "highly controverted"¹⁴ in general scholarship today. The controversy involves contemporary historical-critical scholarship and the way some of today's major figures perceive the validity or abrogation of the law, using such historical-critical methods as source criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and form criticism.¹⁵

These methods are incompatible with a high view of inspiration and a view of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. They investigate the Bible more or less as a book entirely of human origin which developed along evolutionary lines over a long period of time with constantly changing emphases and theologies.¹⁶ Indeed Adventists can make a significant contribution to the Christian world, one in which Scripture's view shines brightly and enters the human mind and heart with its transforming power.

Our author believes that his chapter on law may be his most

significant contribution in the book (p. 112). Thus, it deserves thoughtful reading and analysis. Let us investigate what he says and what kind of contribution he makes.

Four major positions on biblical law are outlined (pp. 112-15). "Believers" who wish to respond to biblical law for "religious reasons" (p. 112) may respond to it in the following four ways:

"Biblical Law as Enduring Codebook"

This position is most perfectly represented by Orthodox Jews "who have developed a code of laws that they obey for 'religious reasons'" (p. 112). He does not explain what he means when he says that they "have developed a code of laws that they obey." Is this "code of laws" biblical laws, biblical laws and rabbinic traditions, or just rabbinic traditions alone? Later illustrations seem to suggest that the entire code of laws of Orthodox Jewry are meant, both oral and written, both biblical and halakhic.

"Biblical Law as Enduring Codebook With NT Modifications"

The author suggests that conservative Christians and many Adventists are the "primary advocates of this approach" (p. 112).

It is significant to note how the author evaluates this view. It is but "a new codebook . . . that acts very much like the Orthodox one [of the Jews], just with different laws" (p. 112). He does not say what the "different laws" are. It is revealing how our author compares this view to the previous one. For him the Orthodox Jewish legalism of the codebook approach is "similar" to the Christian approach to law as exemplified by Christ and the apostles (p. 112).

Would many Christians and Adventists agree with him? Would Christians, who take the New Testament view that certain laws have found their goal in Christ and are no longer to be kept—such as the ceremonial/ritual law and circumcision—support the idea that the binding part of biblical law is a "codebook" similar to that of Orthodox Jews?

Is the analogy accurate? Is it fair? Is a Christian believer, the one who is faithful to God's law even in trying circumstances and under threat to his very life, a legalistic "codebook" performer in the sense of an Orthodox Jew who does not know Christ as Lord and Savior?

If an Adventist in a totalitarian state, or anywhere, knows Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and therefore keeps his commandments (1 John 2:3, 4), is he/she comparable to an Orthodox Jew? We have nothing against Orthodox Jews. They do have their own religion and their own traditions. Orthodox Jews remain faithful to their own roots and Christians to theirs, but they are not identical.

Paul says, "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12, NASB). He has a very positive view of the law here. This text is never mentioned by our author, indicating his selective approach to the New Testament view of law. How is it that this text is not discussed by our author?

We must not be insensitive to the matter of the motivation for keeping the law by Christians. On the other hand our author seems to hold that every believer who abides by the very wording and meaning of God's law is a "codebook" performer, and by implication a believer who has not yet matured. That kind of believer is still in the Orthodox Jewish camp as far as our author's view of the law as "codebook" is concerned (p. 112).

This depiction of a believer who keeps God's law despite the price he/she may pay is demeaning to the faithful one. It seems to be a misrepresentation. Daniel in the lion's den would be perceived as such a "codebook" believer according to this view. The three men in the fiery furnace should have matured and not exposed themselves to such harsh measures. They were still "codebook" performers. Surely they were Jews in a totalitarian political-religious setting. But they are also typological figures of the believers in the end time in similar political-religious settings, just before Christ comes.

I am very comfortable in siding with the author of Hebrews whose faith heroes were obedient (cf. Heb 11:31) even though they "were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb 11:35-38, NRSV). To live like these heroes of faith is the challenge for us today. The big temptation is

to cave in to relativism. This is what seems to have happened to our author.

How would he read Hebrews 11? Would he read it as an account of faith heroes who had not yet matured? Are these faithful, uncompromising believers, who are presented as our examples, just legalistic "codebook" performers on a lower spiritual maturity level? It is to be assumed that our author will have a difficult time to convince Bible readers that this is so.

"Biblical Law as a Series of Codebooks"

The third way to view law, in the author's presentation, is "Biblical Law as a Series of Codebooks" (pp. 113-14). This view is taught in dispensationalism with its sequential dispensations. "Dispensationalism must be given credit for recognizing the diversity of laws in Scripture," writes our author (p. 114).

Although he acknowledges that dispensationalism's seven-era system has problems (p. 114), he seems unaware that the scheme pitches the Old Testament against the New as few other theological systems do.¹⁷

It is surprising that our author credits dispensationalists with having "at least recognized the difficulty in constructing a single codebook by which Christians may order their lives" (p. 114). Obviously the concept of "codebook" continues to be perceived as being negative by our author. In addition, he seems to believe that the Bible has no way of showing a harmonious picture of law (p. 114). Thus he speaks of the "diversity of Scripture," but sometimes he argues that there is a development from a "codebook" to a "casebook" system provided in Scripture itself.

Dispensationalists are credited with the recognition that there is no single "codebook" for Christians. What does this mean for the author and for Adventist believers? For the author it means that there is no "codebook," which is still binding on Christians in any absolute way. In place of a revealed "codebook" which is binding for believers, he constructs a "law pyramid," a concept we will review shortly.

Biblical Law as "Casebook"

The author suggests a fourth way to perceive biblical law: the "casebook" approach. He believes that a "codebook" is only "help-

ful at the early levels of growth" in the believer's life (p. 120). Our author has a subtle way of belittling a believer who regards God's law as immutable. For him Christians need to grow up as regards their view of law. He maintains that "the church, as the body of Christ, . . . will always have a list of rules to get us started, so to speak" (p. 118). Later the rules will be replaced by principles which are applied with the aid of reason (pp. 109, 262).

It is implied that in the course of time the believer reaches a higher stage or higher stages where he/she moves from the "codebook" with a list of rules to the "casebook" approach to law where his/her own rational decisions are made. This means that law is seen as gracious and practical, "without attempting to impose eternal validity on every specific law that God gave" (p. 120). Why make biblical law relative and devoid of eternal validity?

The question of immediate concern is, If "there is no eternal validity on every specific law that God gave," are not all of God's commands at risk, including the Sabbath precept? Christians have always agreed that some laws have met their fulfillment in Christ—such as the ceremonial/ritual law, the national/civil law, and circumcision as well—but others are of permanent value and universal in nature.

For our author the "key point" is that only "the positive principles embedded in the one, the two, and the ten are absolute and enduring, but the specific applications are not" (pp. 120-21). This sentence is printed in italics so as to place special emphasis on it. It, therefore, deserves close attention.

The author reveals in this sentence rather fully what he means. None of the laws of the Bible are absolute or enduring, only the "positive principles" expressed in some of the laws are "absolute and enduring." By contrast Ellen G. White refers to the immutability of the Decalogue,¹⁸ its lasting authority and unchanging character, affirming that "not one command has been annulled; not one jot or tittle has been changed." She speaks of "the sacred, unchanging character of the divine law" which Moses "recorded in the Pentateuch" as an "unerring transcript" of "the great original"¹⁹ law of God in heaven. Our author, to the contrary, reinterprets the immutable law of God and changes it to mere "positive principles."

This is typical of the subtle changes and reinterpretations of his book.

Does our author with his denial of the eternal validity of any biblical law as such—restricting himself to “positive principles” of love only—turn out to be antinomian? We do not wish to think so. But in a technical sense few people would be able to rescue him entirely from the charge of antinomianism, because he maintains only the validity of the “positive principles embedded in the one, the two, and the ten [that] are absolute and enduring” (pp. 120-21).

Jesus' Teaching Omitted

Our author holds that the principles of the law, but not the law as such, ever find new applications in different times and places. How does this measure up to Jesus' own words, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17-19, NASB)?

Obviously Jesus has no problems in supporting “commandments” and the “law” as something of abiding validity. He does not reduce their validity to only “positive principles.” He calls the person “great” who “keeps and teaches” even the least of these commandments. Jesus does not diminish them, but uplifts them. “We cannot disregard one word, however trifling it may seem to us, and be safe. There is not a commandment of the law that is not for the good and happiness of man, both in this life and in the life to come.”²⁰ Followers of Jesus, Bible-believing Adventists and others, will not wish to lag behind their Lord.

The perceptive reader may ask, Why does our author not deal with Jesus' own attitude to and teaching on the law? Is not Jesus the perfect embodiment of God in human flesh? Is He not the God-man and thus the norm? Was He not confronted time and again by His opponents, Pharisees and scribes, over the matter of the law? Why is the reader of this book not guided into Jesus' own teaching?

Why is Jesus' own view omitted? After all, He was the Giver of the Law on Mt. Sinai and He would be the One we should listen to if there is a change! One can only wonder about our author's silence. It is a revealing silence in view of what he has said.

Casebook and Situationism

It is difficult to escape the impression that our author is a contextualist and situationist as regards law and the applications of its principles. He claims that believers need to decide what is enduring and when it is enduring. We will see below how he makes "human reason" the final norm by which to decide (of course, with prayer!) what the principles are and how the principles are to work. Does man not thus become a new law-giver for religious life? Does he not usurp the place and function of God? Is our "human reason" given for that purpose? God forbid!

It is probably not a coincidence that the author himself addresses the matter of situation ethics. He insists that his approach is not one of situation ethics "in the popular sense of 'excuse for sinning'!" (p. 118). We agree. Our author does not teach situation ethics as an "excuse for sinning." But that does not absolve him from a sophisticated form of situation ethics, where sinning is not the purpose but contextualization in which we take the divine law into our own hands, making adjustments as new situations and challenging contexts demand.

The author's positions reveal that he employs a functional approach to Scripture in his emphasis on casebook.²¹ The very choice of the "casebook" concept reveals that he is thinking of different cases, different settings, where "principles," not just laws, function. Since there are only cases that need constant reaction and adaptation, there is no need or place for a specific moral law that is universal. Society and the church are always in flux. There are no absolutes.

Dietary Law

Let us see how the author's "casebook" hypothesis works when it comes to dietary law. In the first place, he holds that dietary law belongs to the fourth level and lowest tier of law under the "law pyramid." He acknowledges that the application of the "law pyra-

mid" requires "a rather advanced level of mental and Christian maturity" (p. 118). It seems best to quote his own words,

"If the *real* reason behind the prohibition [to eat unclean meat] is health, then it is simply an extension of the sixth command; 'Thou shalt not kill.' It is a practical first step to let us know how to keep that command, especially if one is in the desert where food cannot be cooked properly. But positively, the sixth command tells us: 'Do everything possible to enhance and preserve life. As for diet, eat the best food available'" (p. 129).

Reductionist Approach

We ask, Why would God give his people the lengthy instruction in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, if all He needed to say was, "As for diet, eat the best food available"? If the best food of whatever is available is to be eaten, why did God not say that? Why did God present specific and detailed dietary instruction? Are we to assume that He did this because He accommodated Himself to the situation then, a primitive people in the desert?

Should we believe with accommodationists that God adjusted to this primitive people of Israel in the wilderness setting? Is this what our author means when he says that at the time God spoke the dietary law "no further explanation was needed. That is typical for an authoritarian culture and to be expected in a community of ex-slaves" (p. 127)? This can hardly be the answer for God not giving a rationale for the dietary law other than that Israel was to be holy since He is holy.

This approach to diet seems reductionistic. It may be rational to say that the dietary law is simply reduced to a general guideline: we need to eat the best available. If the best is a pig, then eat it, even though it may be repugnant; if the best is lobster, then eat it, even though one is normally a vegetarian; if the best is a monkey's tail, then eat it, even though it may appear to be cruel to kill a monkey. All of this may be rational, but is it biblical?

Apostolic Decisions: Casebook Approach? The claim is made that "Peter and the Jerusalem council moved toward the casebook approach [to law], . . . depending on time and circumstances" (p. 123). His admission that this is but a move in that direction is

revealing. Apparently the early Christians were still partially on a lower level of maturity.

The assertion that there is a move toward the casebook approach is worth pursuing. Is it based on the text of Acts 15? Let us consider this passage for a moment.

Upon two revelational evidences: the visions of the Holy Spirit to Peter and words of Scripture (Amos), James makes the pronouncement of the contents of the decree (Acts 15:19) with the introductory words, "Therefore it is my judgment" It is necessary to point out that this is not a "casebook" approach but a "revelational approach," if we may coin this latter expression. It is built on the words of Scripture which are cited as authority and it is based on the Holy Spirit's supernatural revelation.

Apostolic Decision: Revelation Based/Scripture Supported. Specific instruction is provided in four clearly stated commands. Gentiles should abstain "from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood" (vs. 20, NASB). Certainly "things contaminated by idols" consist of sacrificial meat, called in this text *alisgemata*, pollutions (cf. vss. 20, 29; 21:25),²² which implies allegiance to idols, and the meat was not drained of its blood. Likewise the instruction on the prohibition on eating blood was upheld as cited in Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11. "What is strangled" is an animal improperly slaughtered; hence, the blood had not been removed. Such meat is defiled and improper for human consumption by Christians (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:13, 14). "Fornication" is what is described in Leviticus 18:6-23, a universal law, valid for all times and in all places. Here we receive biblical instruction as to which law is universal and which is limited to ancient Israel as a nation (civil/national law) and as a cultic community (ceremonial/ritual law).

Circumcision of the flesh was no longer needed, although "certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up" (Acts 15:5, NASB) and demanded that circumcision be required. The new covenant, in effect since Christ's death and resurrection, calls for the circumcision of the heart (cf. Deut 10:16; Rom 2:28, 29). This is what counts in the new covenant period (Rom 2:25-29; 4:9-12; Gal 2:7-12; Col 2:11).

It is important to be reminded that circumcision of the heart

is already called for in Deuteronomy 10:16. The ground for determining what laws are still valid since Christ has come is not situation-based, but revelation-based and Scripture supported. This is what the New Testament in harmony with the Old Testament teaches.

Jerusalem Council and Dietary Law

The Jerusalem Council's action (Acts 15) leads us to a definite guideline for the decisions about the requirements for Gentile believers. The decisions of the Jerusalem Council are based on two criteria which are specifically stated in the report:

Supernatural Revelation. The Holy Spirit provided a supernatural revelation for the action to be taken. Peter reminded the Council of the way the Holy Spirit worked to break down the artificial barriers to fellowship between Jews and Gentiles that had been introduced by Jewish tradition. The Holy Spirit had acted supernaturally in a vision to Peter about clean and unclean animals (Acts 10:9-16) and in another vision to Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8, 30-33).²³

Under Peter's preaching the Holy Spirit manifested Himself to Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48) "just as He did also to us" (Acts 15:8, NASB; cf. 11:15), declares Peter as he refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God would not allow man-made barriers of Jewish separatist policy to continue (Acts 10:28). According to these man-made traditions, "oil, bread, milk, and meat could not be purchased from Gentiles." Furthermore, "to eat pagan food was an abomination, but to dine in the house of a pagan was much worse."²⁴ The Holy Spirit broke down these Rabbinic barriers in the way He manifested Himself. The social convention devised by human wisdom was corrected by the Holy Spirit's revelation.

Authority of Scripture. James, the leader of the Jerusalem Council, appealed to another authority for the change. It was not the authority of the elders at the council. It was not the authority of a vote by the assembled church. It was not the authority of the believing community at large. It was instead the authority of Scripture. James declared, "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written" (Acts 15:15, NASB). Then James quotes

the famous passage from Amos 9:11-12,²⁵ which indicated that the Gentile remnant would be part of the people of God.²⁶

The Jerusalem Council provides a clear picture for what is binding and why it is binding. It is binding on the basis of the Holy Spirit's revelation and the testimony of Scripture, but certainly not because of some human application of an abstract principle which finds ever new application.

Jesus' Alleged Rejection of Dietary Law

From these specific considerations on dietary law as presented by our author and our evaluation on biblical principles, we diverge briefly for interested readers to some larger considerations on the issue of dietary law in modern scholarship. Did Jesus reject the food laws? There is a frequent assumption in much contemporary critical scholarship of today that Jesus abolished the food laws of the Old Testament.

Mark 7:14-23. A very recent trend in historical-critical scholarship holds that Jesus himself rejected the dietary laws (not to speak of the Sabbath). We may use as a current example the British scholar James D. G. Dunn.²⁷ He argues that Jesus clashed with the Pharisees on the question of ritual purity and purity of food in Mark 7.

Dunn maintains the words of Mark 7:15, "There is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defiles the man" (NASB), as deriving from Jesus. In these words Jesus provides his criticism of the Pharisaic purity laws, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" (vs. 5, NASB), that is, hands had to be washed before *hullin* (before food could be eaten),²⁸ a Pharisaic practice which followed "the tradition of the elders."²⁹

Verses 17-19, however, which contain the hotly debated and reconstructed sentence, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (so most recent English translations),³⁰ are not from Jesus according to Dunn. He believes that "the original core of verses 17-19 does *not* go back to Jesus but emerged as an interpretative expansion of 7.15 within a Hellenistic-Jewish circle"³¹

He also assumes that such passages as Acts 10:15 and Romans

14:14 reveal an abandonment of the dietary laws of the Old Testament. Whether this is indeed so, of course, is a highly debated issue. In any case, Dunn believes that this is what they mean.

Dunn holds that Jesus' own words in Mark 7:15 gave rise to such an abandonment by later Christians who also wrote verses 17-19.

Understanding Mark 7. How are we to understand the record provided in Mark 7? Thompson is silent on this simply because he has already reinterpreted the meaning of the dietary law and does not need to concern himself with it.

Can a person with a high view of the Scripture's inspiration, one that takes seriously the gospel record as it stands, follow these historical-critical methodologies with their contradictory reconstructions and results? The following assessment is correct: "No doubt there is a crisis in the so-called historical critical method of biblical research."³²

Will it do to assume that there are words in the gospels that were put in the mouth of Jesus either by the gospel writers or by certain Christian circles? A person who accepts the biblical record in its present form cannot accept such ways of interpretation and reconstruction, because they really do not take the text as it comes to us in the Bible seriously.

It is best to follow what Bible-believing Christians have done for centuries. It is best to take the biblical record as it stands.

Jesus' important statement on the defilement that goes into man which does not defile (as stated in Mark 7:15) is correctly understood contextually as defilement entering because of unwashed hands (see vs. 1-5). This defilement is caused by human-made rules; it is not a defilement referred to in any law of the Old Testament.

The things going out of a man that defile refers to moral/ethical defilement caused by an evil heart, as vs. 21 clearly indicates. Jesus does not renounce the dietary laws of the Old Testament. What Jesus refuses to acknowledge are the situation-oriented man-made rules of defilement and the post-biblical purity regulations of rabbinic Judaism. Jesus does not abrogate the dietary law of the Old Testament. Jesus abrogates human-made purity-defilement

traditions. Jesus holds on to the dietary law of His Bible and so should we.

Thompson's Proposed "Law Pyramid"

Definition of the "Law Pyramid"

The author proposes a "law pyramid" (p. 115) which places the principle of love (as the highest norm) at the apex of the pyramid. This is followed by the twin concept of "love of God" and "love of people" on a second and lower tier. The third level, which is again lower than the two upper tiers, consists of the Ten Commandments. This completes the "law pyramid" proper. ("The one, the two, and the ten," p. 114.)

It is suggested that the "law pyramid" is brought into focus in the New Testament (p. 116). The texts that are cited, however without comment, are Matthew 7:12 (the golden rule) and Romans 13:8-10 (p. 116).

Support for the "Law Pyramid." Do these texts, Matthew 7:12 and Romans 13:8-10, really support the "law pyramid"? We agree with our author that Romans 13:8-10 "relates the ten commandments to the one" (p. 116). But does Paul in Romans 13 and Jesus in Matthew 7:12 create a "law pyramid" of the type that the author suggests? Do these texts reveal a hierarchy of higher and lower laws, making "some of God's laws . . . more important than others" (p. 116)? We will have to return to these questions shortly.

"Additional Laws and Commands." There are "additional laws and commands" in the author's view, but they do not have the same place as the "one, the two, and the ten [which] form a pyramid of law that embodies the eternal principles of God's kingdom" (p. 114). Every other law is an application of the three levels of the "law pyramid." The author states, "All other biblical laws are applications of those principles in time and place" (p. 114). Thus all "laws and commands" not included in the "law pyramid" are placed on the lowest level as applications of the principles that make the "law pyramid."

The author supports this "law pyramid" concept with a selected use of biblical texts. He does not exegete or interpret them. They are strung together in proof-text fashion without any attempt

to explain how and why they supposedly support the proposed "law pyramid" (pp. 131-35).

Crucial Matter: What Authority is Assigned the Three Levels?

The most crucial issue in the proposed "law pyramid" is whether the laws are on the same level of importance and normativity, on the same level of authority, or whether there are differing degrees of normativity and authority assigned to the "one" law of love, the "two" laws of love for God and love for people, and the "Ten Commandments."

Here is how the author sees it, "A key principle undergirds the concept of the law pyramid: *some of God's laws are more important than others*" (p. 116, italics his). In this statement the author clearly reveals his basic premise: The "law pyramid" is constructed to establish a hierarchy of importance (and thus authority) as regards law, with a descending order of importance.

Is this the way Scripture presents law? In other words, can such a hierarchy of importance be supported from the Bible? How does the author defend this hierarchy of four levels of law and their relative importance?

The author is aware that his view contains serious problems. He states, "Deeply religious people often find that principle [of some laws being more important than others] difficult to accept, for it seems to exalt human reason above the commands God has asked us to obey . . ." (p. 116). The author is correct in sensing that there is a serious problem, but he is off the mark in saying that this is a problem for "deeply religious people" only. This has nothing to do with whether a person is religious or not. It is not a subjective or personal matter of some people. To the contrary, it is a matter of how the Bible presents law.

Deciding Factor: Reason and/or Revelation?

A very serious problem connected with the author's "law pyramid" is the role of reason and how it relates to revelation. For the author the idea of "reason" is very important. "In short, the Law Pyramid, by defining the relationship between CODEBOOK and CASEBOOK in Scripture, provides a model that integrates reason and revelation with the activity of the Spirit" (p. 262). In his view human reason has priority over divine revelation.

It may be "reasonable" to think of a hierarchy of laws in the "law pyramid," but whether it stands to reason or not is not the real issue. It may stand to reason to depart from the explicit commandment of God in an emergency, but this does not make the departure less sinful. The real issue in his "law pyramid" synthesis is its projection as a model where "the Spirit . . . [is] tested" (p. 262) by "reason sitting in judgment on the evidence" (p. 262).

Bible-believing Christians have used Scripture to test whatever needs testing. This function is now assigned by our author to human reason. He maintains, "The casebook approach allows us—indeed, forces us—to recognize that revelation and reason must work together" (p. 109). This statement is so important that the author has put it in italics.

If reason and revelation are to work together, we may ask, which of the two shall have priority? This is an age old question in theology. Bible-affirming theologians of the past and the present have always maintained that divine revelation stands above reason, informs reason, and puts reason under faith. Martin Luther called reason the "harlot." Others have maintained that faith can never be based on purely rational criteria. Augustine claimed that reason is operative only insofar as it is placed in subjection to prior faith. Thomas Aquinas and his disciples attempt to maintain a delicately balanced view of reason and faith. Other more liberal theologians have given reason a much bigger place than revelation and faith.

Where does our author fit into this tension between reason and faith? He gives us his specific answer (again in italics): "Reason, in dialogue with the Spirit, determines which of those cases [with which revelation deals] are most helpful in informing the decisions we make day by day" (p. 109). While he insists that "revelation and reason must work together" (p. 109), it is clear from this statement that "reason", has the primary role.

When we see as to how this functions in his "law pyramid," then it is apparent that biblical law yields under the power of reason to the principle of love which in turn is always applied to new situations and settings in life. Reason has the upper hand as regards biblical law.

Is this biblical? What about reason sanctified by the Word of God? What about reason subordinated to divine revelation? Reason

by itself can never have the role of priority over divine revelation, Holy Scripture and its laws, and it can never be the arbiter of what is revealed truth and what is not. If reason takes on such a role, then reason and man stand above God and His revelation.

Our author has yielded to the power of reason; Bible-believing Christians, however, will yield to the revealed Word of God and the divine will as expressed in Scripture.

Evaluating the "Law Pyramid" Synthesis

In evaluating the "law pyramid" synthesis the words of Jesus Christ and the apostles are basic and the support of Ellen G. White is important.

Jesus' Summation. The Bible does not share the view that the Ten Commandments are lower than the commands of love for God and love for fellow man. When the Pharisees confronted Jesus with the priority question "which is the great commandment in the law" (Matt 22:36), he responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39, RSV).

The author of the book under discussion changes the intent of Jesus' words by assigning to love the highest place in his "law pyramid" (pp. 114-17). "Love, the pinnacle of the Law Pyramid, is both the unifying concept in Scripture and its motivational focus" (p. 261).³³

Is love a principle higher than these two commandments to which Jesus refers when he is confronted by Pharisees? The Pharisees, of course, are known to have exalted the relationship with God in the first four commandments above the last six dealing with human relationships. The Pharisees had a law pyramid of their own. They gave more importance to the first four commandments and less importance to the remainder. In their view the law to love God above all was the highest commandment and the law to love the neighbor was of lesser importance.

Jesus Christ did not endorse this Pharisaic view when He was asked the very question which is the "greatest" commandment in the law. He said that the "second is like it." Jesus did not buy into

the view that some commandments are more important than others. Are we to buy into this view?

No Devaluation of the Decalogue by Jesus. There is a second distinction between what the author suggests and what Jesus Christ teaches. The author says that the Ten Commandments (third level) are "defined" (p. 114) by the two commandments of love to God and to fellow humans (second level). In his "law pyramid" the Ten Commandments are on the third level down and "defined" by something higher up. Jesus Christ did not say this. He did not devalue the Ten Commandments in this manner when He summarized their twofold foundational principle of love to God and to fellow human beings. Rather He says, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (vs. 40, NRSV).

What does Jesus mean by the "law and the prophets"? Does this phrase mean the Ten Commandments? Hardly so. The phrase "the law and the prophets" refers to the entire Scripture of Jesus' day, that is, the Old Testament. The whole Old Testament is summed up in the "two commandments." But in no way does this mean that the "two commandments" are above the Old Testament, nor does it mean that the Ten Commandments are lower than the "two commandments," or the Old Testament. Rather, it means that all Scripture "hangs" on these two.

It is inescapable that a hierarchy of the kind that our author suggests is not supported by the very texts that he quotes, but leaves unexplained (p. 115). The "law pyramid" lacks the support of Jesus Christ. The "two commandments" of love to God and love to fellow human beings are the sum of the Old Testament and not just the Decalogue. They are also the sum of the Ten Commandments, because they are a part of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Ellen G. White states incisively, "The law given upon Sinai was the enunciation of the principle of love, a revelation to earth of the law of heaven."³⁴ There is here no value judgment either as to what is higher and lower. Jesus demonstrated by His own obedience to the law that He "testified to its [the law's] immutable character and proved that through His grace it could be perfectly obeyed by every son and daughter of Adam."³⁵

Paul stresses, "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12, NASB). The "Law" is

the moral law of the Decalogue, because Paul refers in vs. 7 to the commandment, "You shall not covet." The holiness of the Ten Commandments is just as important as the holiness of God because the purpose of the law is to make men holy to the Lord (Exod. 19:5, 6).³⁶

Ellen G. White's Position

Since the author employs Ellen G. White frequently—although he is charged with using her writings selectively³⁷—we may listen to her on the point of the relationship of the principle of love to God and fellow human beings and the Ten Commandments. Does she place love, as the highest principle, on a more important level than love to God and man on the next level? And does she locate the Ten Commandments on a yet lower level of importance?

We will cite from Ellen G. White's writings as we continue our analysis, but we note her observation on the Pharisee's arrangement of the Decalogue: "The Pharisees had exalted the first four commandments, which point out the duty of man to his maker, as of far greater consequence than the other six, which define man's duty to his fellow man."³⁸ For our author, when "two lesser laws seem to clash, we appeal to a higher level. . . . For example, should one obey God or parents (first commandment versus fifth)" (p. 117)? Our author suggests that a prayerful weighing of the "ten [commandments] in the light of the two [love to God and man] and in the light of the one [love] will yield an answer" (p. 117). Thus he distinguishes between higher and lower laws, and he suggests that (upon prayer!) a lower law may be broken or disobeyed (p. 117)!

Ellen G. White disagrees with our author's conclusion. "Both these commandments [love to God and man] are an expression of the principle of love. The first cannot be kept and the second broken. When God has His rightful place on the throne of the heart, the right place will be given to our neighbor. . . . And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially."³⁹

She sums up the equality of love and love to God and man: "And since all the commandments are summed up in love to God and man, it follows that not one precept can be broken without violating this principle. . . . Our Lord presents the first four and the

last six commandments as a divine whole, and teaches that love to God will be shown by obedience to all His commandments."⁴⁰

Ellen G. White does not support our author's "law pyramid," despite the fact that he has attempted to reinterpret her along the lines of progressive revelation (p. 114). Neither does she endorse his view that "some laws are more important than others." Her view does not envision higher and lower importance or priority levels, nor does she support our author's position that in case of conflict one can choose to keep the so-called higher law over an allegedly lower one by means of the use of human reason and prayer (pp. 261-62).

Ellen G. White affirmed that on Mt. Sinai God showed "to all men the sacredness, the importance, and the permanence of His law."⁴¹ She emphasizes, "In the Ten Commandments these principles [of duty to God and to man as expressed in the two commands of love to God and love to neighbor] are carried out in detail, and made applicable to the condition and circumstances of man."⁴² Her emphasis rests as well on universal applicability and complete immutability of the entire Ten Commandments. They are valid in all places and at any time. The immutability of all of the commandments of the Decalogue is emphasized for all ages, ours included: "The law of God is as immutable as His throne. It will maintain its claims upon mankind in all ages."⁴³

The new covenant believer (see Jer. 31:31-34) will have the law, the Decalogue, written upon the heart. This means that he will not only keep the commandments outwardly but also with full spiritual implications—through the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit.

Our author maintains, "A codebook is necessary and helpful at the early levels of growth," but his proposed casebook approach to law "enables us to see law . . . without attempting to impose eternal validity on every specific law that God gave" (p. 120). Ellen G. White, upon whom the author calls for developing his "law pyramid," does not call "every specific law that God gave" into question as he does. She has a norm of love to God and fellow human beings as expressed in the Ten Commandment law which "maintains its claim upon mankind in all ages."⁴⁴

Ellen G. White points out that there are amplifications and particularizations of the Ten Commandments which God gave in

additional precepts and judgments, in laws not written by God's own finger but communicated privately to Moses and recorded by him. Notice how she explains this. "These laws were to be recorded by Moses, and carefully treasured as the foundation of the national law, and, with the ten precepts [of the Decalogue] which they were given to illustrate, the condition of the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel."⁴⁵

These additional statutes, the so-called Covenant Code of Exodus 20:22-23:33, formed the foundation of the "national law," or civil law, of ancient Israel. The implication is that when Israel would cease to function as a nation, then the "national law" would no longer be needed. The Decalogue, however, is not Israel's "national law." The Decalogue was given for all mankind everywhere and is immutable.

We have seen that Ellen G. White designated the Ten Commandments as the universal, immutable law for all mankind in all ages. In that sense the Decalogue/Ten Commandments stand apart from Israel's national/civil law by which the nation as a political entity was to function as long as her national life existed. It also stands apart from the ceremonial/ritual laws which in the Israelite worship took care of the sins of the people and pointed forward to the true Lamb of God. "When the typical sacrifices ceased at the death of Christ, the original law, engraved in tablets of stone, stood immutable, holding its claims upon man in all ages."⁴⁶

Is the construct of the "law pyramid" faithful to the specific views provided by Ellen G. White? A reading of her writings on her own terms differs significantly from the proposals made by the author. Shall we stay with the words of Jesus Christ and apostles regarding the law? Shall we stay with the explicit words of Ellen G. White? Or shall we depart from them to follow the "law pyramid" hypothesis with its higher and lower laws, with laws of greater and lesser importance, with "human reason" as a higher norm than what God wrote with His own finger?

As we noted earlier, the author elaborates that the "law pyramid" is not to be used "to excuse sin and to do as we please, . . ." (p. 118). This is reassuring, but does it place him outside the camp of situation ethics and contextualization? Can our author extricate himself from the fact that he employs a sophisticated form of

situation ethics, certainly not a "popular" one? Time and again he points out that new situations in another "time and place" call for a different response to law. Only the "positive principles" of the law remain valid, but not the law itself.

The very hierarchy of the "law pyramid" is designed to create a distinction of higher and lower laws, of laws which are more important and others which are less so. The higher principles outrank the lower ones in given situations and a person (with prayer!) has to make a decision based on "human reason" as to what needs to be done in alleged cases of conflict. Does the fact that one agonizes and even prays before one departs from God's law make the breaking of God's law more acceptable? To whom? To God or to us? It is not possible to escape the conclusion that our author's position is indeed a form of situation ethics and contextualization.

Historical-Criticism and Relativism

Our author reveals a historical-critical methodology of progressive development in this book (pp. 270-72). We have recognized that he has a developmental approach to law in a hierarchical fashion. He believes that there is an ongoing development in the Bible and in the church subsequently. Therefore, nothing can remain absolute in the true sense, except the highest "positive principle" of love. The result of all of this is relativism.

He seems to wish to justify his "law pyramid" by noting that "it is precisely what is required by a community with a world-wide mission" (p. 114). Instead of teaching the "commandments of God" as a key characteristic of the end-time remnant (Rev 14:6-12), our author is explicit: he has no absolute law as such, not even the moral law of the Ten Commandments (p. 115). What he has left are only "principles." Are these "the absolutes in Scripture" (p. 109)? Even the principles demand new applications in different settings, times and places. How can we preach the validity of the Sabbath as universally binding in all situations as a final test of loyalty in contrast to the mark of the beast, if everything is relativized?

Summary

We have taken much space to describe and evaluate major points in this "codebook/casebook" dichotomy approach to biblical law. We have observed time and again that the hierarchical arrange-

ment of higher and lower laws and principles is hardly faithful to what Scripture and Jesus Christ hold. Ellen G. White too has another view than the one our author presents, even though he claims to have been stimulated by her writings to develop his hypothesis. He may have been stimulated by her but he was not faithful to her views.

According to our author there is no single law, not even one of the Ten Commandments, that has eternal validity. His reductionism has forced him to a radical reinterpretation of the Scriptural evidence, Jesus' own teaching on law and that of Paul, and also the views of Ellen G. White.

We do not doubt the sincerity of his endeavors, but we question whether he is faithful to the biblical witness, the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, and the pen of the Messenger to the remnant. Faith, law and ethics have a better foundation than the situational-conditioned relativism encountered in our author's proposals. His hypotheses and proposals have stimulated a renewed study of Scripture on Scripture's own terms as the Word of God.

God's law, however, is to be defined neither as "casebook" nor as "codebook," but as divine revelation. Modernistic superimpositions from contemporary thought and ethical debates regarding "casebook/codebook" onto Scripture bring in concepts from human traditions that are alien to the Word of God itself. Let Scripture interpret itself and let Scripture be Scripture.

Holiness: The Revealed Purpose of Biblical Law

In order to be faithful to the Creator's intent we need to go to the Scriptures where the revealed design for biblical law is provided. We turn our attention to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, and particularly the book of Exodus, to find a revealed norm on the subject of law. Exodus has three parts (Part I, chs. 1-18, Part II, chs. 19-24, and Part III, chs. 25-40). We submit that the contents of these three parts—which are in historical sequence—is of vital importance for a biblical understanding of law.

Redemption from Slavery

In the first section (chs. 1-18) we learn that Israel is enslaved both physically and spiritually. But the record tells of the mighty

acts of the redeeming, saving and liberating Lord who set Israel free from the bondage of slavery. Yahweh shows Himself as the only God who is fully Master of the situation. His will in saving a slave people cannot be opposed.

Israel emerges from Egypt after devastating plagues have fallen upon God's opponents. Israel is saved by the Lord who destroys the pursuing Egyptian army in another natural catastrophe as He leads Israel miraculously through the Red Sea. In short, Israel is redeemed; she is liberated; Israel is set free. This is an act of divine redemption and liberation.

How would this redeemed, liberated, free Israel now function? There are major choices available to Israel. Israel could now decide to "go it alone." She could decide to forge ahead without God, making it in the world on her own. A second choice (suggested by some Israelites) was to return to the flesh pots of Egypt. Some urged that this should be done (Exod. 16:3). A third alternative for Israel was to turn to her redeeming and liberating Lord as never before for continued guidance, direction, and blessing. This was to be the only way to go. These were major choices with major implications for her future.

Covenantal Relationship

The central section of Exodus (chs. 19-24) portrays the covenant between God and Israel. The covenant God offered was the most profound arrangement known in the ancient world. No nation in the ancient world had a covenant with a deity. We know about the so-called vassal treaties between a superior (suzerain) king and an inferior (vassal) king from the ancient Near East. These were contractual arrangements that had binding force. There is a degree of analogy between the suzerainty treaties and the biblical covenant in the Old Testament but they are by no means identical.

The redeemer God, who made Israel who she was, who showed His blessings on her in multiple, marvelous acts, wanted to enter into a deep and lasting relationship with His redeemed people. He would be their God and they would be His people. This profound and transforming relationship is set in terms of a unique and special covenant between God and Israel. At the heart of the covenant

would be the perfect revelation of God's own character, His law, the Ten Commandments.

Let us be clear on the sequence in the book of Exodus: First came redemption and salvation, then came the law for the redeemed and liberated people. This sequence is very significant, because it reveals that the law was not given as an instrument of salvation. That is, it is not provided as a way to salvation. It is not given so that they could work themselves into a state of redemption and salvation. No. They were already a saved people; they stood in a state of salvation. But the question that Israel faced was how to live acceptably in this state of salvation.

How is the purpose of the law disclosed by this setting in the book of Exodus and in the flow of the plan of salvation? Do the Ten Commandments (God given) teach that Israel cannot keep the law? Were these "ten words" spoken on Mt. Sinai given so that Israel would fail and come under condemnation? Are these ten laws historically-conditioned commandments that can be adjusted as new circumstances in new times and places demand? There is no indication in the text that would allow us to affirm any of these questions.

Law as a Way of Holy Living

Here is a setting, a *Sitz im Leben*, that is unmistakable. Israel is free and the question is, How is Israel to live in freedom? How can Israel as God's people live in this world of wickedness? How can the redeemed people of God succeed in a world where sin reigns?

God has the solution. He has the answer. God has led them into the desert to sustain them miraculously day by day with the food from heaven. Their Redeemer-God gives them rules, ten in all. These are so comprehensive and all-encompassing that they define perfectly the relationship which is to exist between Him and His people—expressed in the first four commandments (the vertical dimension of the believer's life), and the relationship which is to exist between fellow human beings (the horizontal dimension in the life of the believer) in the last six commandments.

In short, the Ten Commandments are "the way of life"⁴⁷ for a redeemed and liberated people. The Decalogue is framed in the second person singular, as is preserved in the old English way of

translating the commandments with “thou shalt” (“Do”) and “thou shalt not” (“Don’t”), so as to address each individual in a personal way.⁴⁸ These universal moral laws are as it were the orders of the divine King of kings who individually addresses His subjects. The commandments of the Decalogue are concrete imperatives, applicable to every individual anywhere and any time.

The Decalogue is not negative law in any sense whatsoever. The Decalogue is not taking anything away from human beings. The Decalogue is God’s perfect way to ensure human safety and well-being. It is leading them along the path of holiness. The commandments of the Decalogue are indeed the special way of life for the redeemed, saved, and liberated children of God whom He wishes to be holy as He is holy. Since the giving of the law follows Israel’s redemption, it is evident that the law cannot be used for the sake of gaining salvation.

Purpose of the Sanctuary

Exodus 25-40, the third and final part of the book of Exodus, deals with the sanctuary, its purpose, design, function, priesthood and sacrifices. Why a sanctuary? What purpose have the sacrifices? The sanctuary is provided for God to dwell among them (Exod. 25:8, 9), to be sure. God wanted to be with his covenant community. Here fellowship, nearness, closeness, and communion come to expression.

The sanctuary and its services are also needed for saved Israelites, who would fall into sin, and thus experience separation, alienation and defilement, to be restored, to be forgiven, and to be returned into the proper faith relationship with God. While the law is the way of life for God’s people, the sanctuary with its sacrifices will take care of the sins of Israel when they have disobeyed God, broken the law, and infringed on His will. Thus, the three parts of the book of Exodus communicate (1) redemption/salvation in the exodus experience; then (2) law as the way of life—a standard of behavior—for the redeemed people; and finally (3) the way to get rid of sin and to gain forgiveness in the atonement process provided for in the sanctuary and its services.

This macrostructure of the salvation process has the covenant law in the form of the Decalogue as its center, providing the proper

way of life, as a special goal. Without overstating the case, the Decalogue is the divine constitution upon which God has built His people. God's people will never at any time dare to reinterpret, change, abstract one or more principles from that which is the expression of the very character of God. God expressed in the Decalogue that which is immutable just as He Himself is immutable.

God's Objective

The Lord stated His goal for the people in one of the most profound sentences in the entire Bible: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5, 6, NASB). There are two basic ideas here. The first is obeying God's voice and the keeping of His covenant.⁴⁹ This means the keeping of the covenant relationship by keeping the law, the Ten Commandments.

Obedience is not for the sake of gaining salvation, but arises as the result of the salvation that has been gained through the mighty works of God in the redemption process. What then is the purpose for keeping the law? It has the purpose of making them "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation." God wants His people to be holy (Exod. 22:31; cf. Lev. 19:2). This is the prospective goal to the keeping of the law.

Priesthood

We cannot pursue in detail now the idea of God's people functioning as "a kingdom of priests." What seems to be meant is that they were to be priests to other nations. There is embedded here the full concept of Israel as an evangelistic and missionary people to nations of the world, bringing them to a knowledge of the true God.

Holy People

The idea of a "holy nation" appears here for the first time. It has special emphasis. The idea of "holy" means on the one hand separated unto God and on the other hand to show forth the goal and moral character that God wants his people to possess. This goal is clearly stated in Exodus 22:31, "You shall be holy men to Me,"

and it is repeated by Moses in Deuteronomy 7:6: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Holiness means separation from the world and a life devoted to God, His will and purpose.

God elected Israel from the peoples of the earth with the intent to make them a "holy people," who would "keep" and "obey" His voice and covenant (Exod. 19:5, 6), "all His commandments" (Deut. 26:18). God promised His people that they would "be a people holy to the Lord your God" (Deut. 26:19, NRSV). This is clearly a prediction made by God of what Israel would be like.

Law's Educational Function. The Ten Commandments, as we have seen, are the way of life for God's covenant people. They are the educator of God's people in their new, redeemed lives. They are the means whereby God's people can reveal that they are "holy" and separated to the Lord their God. The people are to be changed "into an order of priesthood, 'a kingdom of priests,' a holy nation."⁶⁰ In other words, the law (*torah*) is given under God's transforming grace to bring about a changed behavior, a new lifestyle, a new loyalty to the heavenly King.

The Standard of Holiness. What is holiness? Is it in being different from the other nations? Is it in having a national identity? Is it Israel's genius? Is it that Israelites are normally better than all the nations? These and other possibilities come to mind. However, all of these possible intentions are rejected in the Bible. There is but one reason for the holiness of Israel, for their otherness, for their uniqueness. It resides in the holiness of God.⁶¹ As we have seen, the call for them to become a "holy nation" (Exod. 19:6, 5) is connected with the covenant-law, the Ten Commandments, which spells out the way of life for God's people.

Holiness Linked to Dietary Law. The idea of the holiness of the people of Israel is mentioned again in the Pentateuch in Leviticus 11. It had not been mentioned since Exodus 19:6 and 22:31. We have good reasons to believe that this is by design in God's revelation. God provides the motivation for the dietary law in the concluding words, "For I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; thus you shall be holy for I am holy" (Lev.

11:45, NASB). Here the prospective goal of faithfulness to the law of God, including the dietary law, comes again into view.

The purpose of the law whether the Decalogue or the dietary law is not to bring salvation; the purpose of the law is to make the people holy, unique, belonging totally to God. It reveals their separateness from the world and their belonging to God. The law comes from God who is Himself holy. He is the beneficent Giver of the law which is thus "holy, righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). He is holy. His law is holy. And His people are to be holy. In His giving them His law He provides the means for a lifestyle that makes holy.

Holiness: a Divine Accomplishment. Holiness is not understood as a human achievement; it is meant as a gift, a work that God will accomplish in His people redeemed from the land of Egypt, redeemed from the slavery of the world. It is a work that God will achieve through His Spirit in the changed lifestyle by a commandment-keeping people. We must be fully cognizant of the fact that even in the Old Testament the Lord takes the credit for making Israel holy: "The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways" (Deut 28:9, NSAB). The holiness of His people is God's act, and commandment-keeping will show that we are the people of God.

The apostle Peter echoes this very theme. He insists that the "holy nation" spoken of in Exodus 19:6 is now the church (1 Pet 2:9). God's people of today are "obedient children," writes Peter, who are not "conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:14-16, NRSV). Peter actually quotes Lev. 11:44,⁵² the very rationale given for the dietary laws.

The End-Time Remnant and God's Law

The end-time remnant (Rev. 12:17; 14:12) does not consist of a people who make adjustments to God's law depending on changing times, differing places and new circumstances. They do not reinterpret God's law. They do not abstract principles from God's law while they ignore or depart from the law and its intentions as the Lord has given it. They are commandment-keeping people.

Circumstances, however adverse, will not deter them from complete loyalty to their Lord Jesus Christ, who also refused to abandon the law and came down to this earth to redeem fallen humanity through His substitutionary, atoning death. Thus, God's true people will always have the moral fortitude and the divinely provided stamina of faith to do what is right, even in trying times and very difficult situations. The "holy" remnant (Isa. 4:2, 3) of the last days is described as consisting of "saints [literally, 'holy ones'] who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, NRSV).

The Lord knows our time and He has His "saints/holy ones" who are faithful to Him and continue to keep His commandments. That is the kind of "saint/holy one" that He envisions and that He has created for the time of the end. These kinds of "saints/holy ones" will proclaim the Three Angels' messages while they keep the "commandments of God" and show to the world what it means to be a genuine child of God in the last days of the world's history.

Endnotes

¹ We should not assume that law is without controversy outside of Christianity. See E. B. Firmage, B. G. Weiss and J. W. Welch, *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

² See W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 109-40; Hartmut Gese, "The Law," *Essays in Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1981), 60-92; H. Hübner, "Das Gesetz als elementares Thema einer Biblischen Theologie," *Kerygma und Dogma* 22 (1976) pp. 250-76; Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Law as a Topic of Biblical Theology," *Reconciliation, Law & Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 110-33.

³ Published in 1991 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD. See on the law particularly pp. 110-36.

⁴ See particularly, Robert H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Biblica* 66 (1985), pp. 1-38; Bo Reicke, "Paulus über das Gesetz," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 41 (1985), 237-57; A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Paul and the Law," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985), 613-22; J. M. G. Barclay, "Paul and the Law: Observations on Some Recent Debates," *Themelios* 12/1 (1986), pp. 5-15; idem, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988); J. Lambrecht, "Gesetzesverständnis bei Paulus," in *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament*, ed. K. Kertelge (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 88-127; Douglas J. Moo, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987), pp. 287-307; D. Zeller, "Zur neueren Diskussion über das Gesetz bei Paulus," *Theologie und Philosophie* 62 (1987), 497-99; F. F. Bruce, "Paul and the Law in Recent Research," *Law and Religion in Israel and Early Christianity*, ed.

B. Lindars (Cambridge: James Clark, 1988), pp. 115-25; Günther Klein, "Ein Sturmszentrum der Paulusforschung," *Verkündigung und Forschung* 33 (1988), pp. 40-56; Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Abolition and Fulfillment of the Law in Paul," *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 35 (1989), 47-74; idem, "'Works of Law' in Paul," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991), pp. 217-44.

5 R. D. Linder, "Antinomianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984) p. 57.

6 Hugh J. Blair, "Antinomistic Controversy," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1974) p. 48.

7 Linder, p. 58.

8 Hugh J. Blair, "Antinomianism," *The International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974) p. 48.

9 E. F. Kevan's study, *Keep His Commandments* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1964), and his *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964), are particularly insightful on the law in Puritanism as a whole. Note also Bryan W. Ball, *The English Connection* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1981), pp. 120-37.

10 *Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1323.

11 Hugh, "Antinomianism," p. 48.

12 Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*, pp. 110-31.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

14 Stuhlmacher, p. 110.

15 See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1985). A very incisive critique of the historical-critical method is provided by Eta Linnemann, a major New Testament scholar in Germany who also taught at the University of Marburg, the very place where the higher critic Rudolf Bultmann held his professorial chair and under whom she took part of her training. Linnemann's book, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), is a must for understanding the deeper working and goals of the historical-critical method of today. This major historical-critical scholar turned conservative and "critiques the closed world view and other pagan assumptions that underlie both the philosophy of the modern university and much of the historical-critical study of the Bible," as stated by professor E. Earle Ellis.

16 See Richard M. Davidson, "The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/1 (1990): pp. 39-56; George Reid, "Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2/1 (1991): pp. 69-76.

17 See the essays in John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), which show the problems of discontinuity which are caused by dispensationalists.

18 See the chapter entitled, "God's Law Immutable," in the *Great Controversy*, pp. 433-50.

19 White, *Great Controversy*, p. 434: "The law of God in the sanctuary in heaven is the great original, of which the precepts inscribed upon the tables of stone and recorded by Moses in the Pentateuch were an unerring transcript. Those who arrived at an understanding of this important point were thus led to

the sacred, unchanging character of the divine law. They saw, as never before, the force of the Savior's words: 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law.' Matthew 5:18. The law of God, being a revelation of His will, a transcript of his character, must forever endure, 'as a faithful witness in heaven.' Not one command has been annulled; not one jot or tittle has been changed. Says the psalmist: 'Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.' 'All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever.' Psalms 119:89; 111:7, 8."

20 White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 52.

21 On the functional approach to Scripture, see the penetrating study of David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

22 See C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964), pp. 138-53.

23 See the insightful essay by Colin House, "Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of *KOINOS/KOINOO* in Acts 10 and 11," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (1983), 143-53, in which he argues that the vision indicates that the man-made Jewish concept of defilement by association with Gentiles was to have no bearing on those in the Christian faith.

24 T. C. Smith, "Acts," *The Broadman Bible commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970), 10:67.

25 See Gleason L. Archer and Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), pp. 152-55.

26 See the study of Acts 15:14-20 by O. Palmer Robertson, "Hermeneutics of Continuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), pp. 89-108.

27 James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), pp. 37-60.

28 R. P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark*. "Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement 13." (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), p. 202.

29 See Dunn, p. 57 n. 66, on the issue of whether the opponents were Pharisees or *haberim*. Booth, p. 202, takes them to be *haberim*.

30 KJV reads "and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?"

31 Dunn, p. 47 (italics his).

32 J. Beutler, "Response from a European Perspective," *Semeia* 53 (1991), p. 197.

33 See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th rev. and expanded ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 139-71, on the problem of a "unifying concept" or similar notions. Note also my article, "The Totality of Scripture versus Modernistic Limitations," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2/1 (Spring, 1991), 30-52.

34 Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 46.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

37 Cf. Norman R. Gulley, *Ministry* (Dec. 1991), 29.

38 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 606.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 607.

40 Ibid.

41 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 309.

42 Ibid., p. 305.

43 Ibid., p. 365.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p. 311.

46 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:392.

47 The expression of law as "a way of life" is used by theologians of various backgrounds. See, for example, Stuhlmacher, p. 130.

48 Here we disagree with Moshe Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue and Its Place in Jewish Tradition," *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, ed. Ben-Zion Segal (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 10-11, who sees the Decalogue restricted to Israel.

49 See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982).

50 See Moshe Greenberg, "Three Conceptions of the Torah in the Hebrew Scriptures," *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte. Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz und Ekkehard W. Stegemann (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 366.

51 See Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine and Human Holiness," *Adventists Affirm* 4/2 (1990), 7-11.

52 See E. Nestle and K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (24th ed.; Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1960), 660.

A FEW THOUGHTS ON ALDEN THOMPSON'S CHAPTER: NUMBERS, GENEALOGIES, DATES

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Alden Thompson has in a clear fashion addressed a number of important issues that have been of special interest within certain Adventist circles. Although I find myself mostly at variance both with how he defines the various problems, and how he would "solve" them, let me say at the outset that he does raise important questions that I think we all need to examine. At the same time, it should be noted that none of the issues he raises are new—indeed, many of them have been debated by scholars for over a hundred years.

The point of Thompson's chapter, "Numbers, Genealogies, Dates" appears to be that even though the Bible may contain difficulties that raise questions about its reliability (the author infers that these difficulties be considered "mistakes" on p. 236) we should still be able to retain confidence in it. On the surface I have no particular problem with the author's point. I am reminded of Ellen White's statement, "Some look to us gravely and say, 'Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?' This is all probable. . ."¹ The presence of "low magnitude" problems (those which fall within the realm of "lower textual criticism") resulting from copyist or translator errors are

well known and bother few informed students of the Bible, even those who retain a "high view" of Scripture.

However, some of the problems that the author poses from his more "analytical" reading of the biblical text do not strike me as problems that arise from within the text. Rather, they appear to result from interpretations that various scholars have imposed *upon* the text—interpretations that have been prompted by such things as archaeological discoveries, geological interpretations, philosophical presuppositions, and the like.

I wish I had time and space to deal specifically with each of the numerous issues the author raises in his chapter on numbers, genealogies and dates, but unfortunately I must restrict myself to the four or five points that have especially attracted the attention of my students, colleagues and friends. Specifically, I will examine some of the reasons and arguments critical scholars have given for: (1) considering 1 Kings 6:1 to be artificial; (2) defending the 13th century B.C. Exodus date; (3) denying a universal flood; (4) the unreliability of chronological data based on genealogical data such as in Gen. 15:13-16; (5) the unreliability of genealogical and/or numerical data in passages such as Num. 3:27, etc.

I would not want to leave the presumptuous impression that I am providing the last word on items which have challenged generations of biblical scholars. I certainly am not. However, one of the serious deficiencies of Thompson's work is that he fails to inform his readers of the numerous counter-arguments that scholars, both liberal and conservative (albeit for different reasons!), have produced for the very problems which Thompson raises. I believe it is important to see these counter-arguments, not only so readers may realize that some of the positions which Thompson entertains may not be as strong as he suggests, but also so they will recognize that the dichotomy which Thompson sets up in the beginning of his chapter between "casual" and "analytical" readers is a bit over- simplistic.

The Date of the Exodus/Conquest

The Problem

With regard to the date of the Exodus, the specific problem the author poses is that the traditional date many conservatives hold

for this event (ca. 1445 B.C.) is based on a text (1 Kings 6:1) whose chronological datum *may* be artificially contrived from a hypothetical 12, 40-year generations (his emphasis). Specifically, the author states that 1 Kings 6:1 “might be more helpful in addressing the time of the Exodus if it did not happen to be the other example in which genealogies rather than historical records *may* have been the source for the time period cited” (p. 233).

This concern, in turn, leads Thompson to include the 13th century Exodus date as Plan 2 among his three possible viable “conservative” options. He defends this inclusion by noting, “While 1445 still has strong advocates, now even some scholars holding to inerrancy support the 1290 date. The issue between liberals and conservatives is no longer which date, but whether there was an Exodus of miraculous proportions at all!” (p. 234).

Thus, these quotations, supposedly based on a more “analytical” study of the text, lead the reader to draw three conclusions, all of which I believe are questionable. First, that 1 Kings 6:1 is artificially contrived; second, that the 13th century Exodus date is now a viable option; third, even “inerrant” conservatives are now adopting the 13th century date.

While I would agree with Thompson that the current debate between conservatives and liberals is over whether a miraculous Exodus even occurred,² I do not agree that the 13th century option is still tenable (although it must be pointed out that Thompson does not indicate whether he would personally accept, or limit himself to, one of these three plans—see p. 235). Nor do I view the basis for 1 Kings 6:1 to be as “questionable” as our author apparently does.

Why was 1 Kings 6:1 Challenged?

In beginning our remarks on 1 Kings 6:1, a question might be raised as to what factors could have motivated early scholars to challenge the reliability of 1 Kings 6:1 in the first place. It appears that most of the early skepticism over the 480 years emerged because this time period did not fit into the *preconceived historical reconstructions* of early Egyptologists who were inclined to place the Exodus during the time of the 19th dynasty pharaoh, Rameses II, on the basis of the appearance of the name Rameses in Exod. 1:11.³ These scholars assumed that if the Hebrew slaves built a city

named Rameses, they must have done it during a time when a pharaoh by that name ruled. The identification of the city of Rameses with Tanis, a city in the eastern delta which did not exist before the 13th century, seemed to lock in the Exodus date to this century. Thus, as T. H. Robinson later pointed out, "The whole theory of a nineteenth dynasty date [i.e. the 13th century B.C.] for the Exodus rests on two names in that verse."⁴

Since it was clear among these scholars that the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 would place the Exodus in the middle of the 15th century (around 1450 B.C.), they were confronted with the problem of *reducing* the 480 years to a number that would conform to their 13th century theory.

The typical solution was to assume that the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 were derived from multiplying an "idealized" 40-year generation by 12.⁵ Therefore, they guesstimated the actual number of years in an "actual Jewish generation" and would multiply this substituted number by 12 to determine the "real time" interval between the Exodus and Solomon. A good example of this practice is provided by the famous Egyptologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, who claimed a Jewish generation was *actually* only 22 years (although he does not say where he got this number). He was thus able to reduce the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 to 210 years, which fit precisely with his 13th century Exodus date of 1220 B.C.⁶

However, certain archaeological discoveries such as the Merneptah stele, which describes a battle between the pharaoh Merneptah and Israel around 1220 B.C., indicated that Israel was *already* in Palestine by this time. This forced many scholars to push their Exodus date earlier into the 13th century. The length for the "typical Jewish generation" was, therefore, conveniently adjusted to fit the new data. Thus, some scholars modified the typical Jewish generation to 25 years⁷ or even 30-33 years.⁸ W. F. Albright, aware of how archaeological discoveries were in danger of overtaking historical theories, allowed himself considerably more leeway on this point by saying, "The number 'forty' is universally recognized as a round number, indicating roughly a generation, i.e. between twenty and forty years."⁹

As to why the author of 1 Kings 6:1 used 40-year generations rather than the *actual* number (whatever, that was!), scholars gave

various responses.¹⁰ J. W. Jack arbitrarily suggested that 40 years was the typical length of the Hebrew *dor*, which he translated as "generation."¹¹ Albright, on the other hand, tried to provide support for the idea of a Jewish generation of 40 years by noting that the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, in the absence of a fixed written tradition, reckoned time by generations of 40 years.¹²

Objections to the 12 times 40-Year Generations

However, numerous scholars, including many liberals, have rejected such arguments out of hand.¹³ The most well-known is Martin Noth, the German Old Testament scholar. Concerning 1 Kings 6:1 Noth wrote,

"...the common claim that 480 means simply a series of 12 generations, each lasting 40 years, is certainly wrong; for the figure 40 is too high for the interval between one generation and the next. The figure 40 is in fact used on occasion as a round number but with a quite different significance. Furthermore, Dtr. [Noth's hypothetical author of 1 Kings 6:1] based his chronology not on "generations" but on concrete figures and 480 must therefore fit in with these concrete figures."¹⁴

It must be pointed out that Noth was not interested in establishing the historicity of the biblical text by these comments.¹⁵ Rather, he was actually interested in establishing the idea that the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings (and portions of other books) were essentially the unified work of a hypothetical mid-sixth century B.C. historian whom Noth called the Deuteronomist, or simply Dtr.¹⁶

Although conservative scholars would likely disagree with the idea that 1 Kings 6:1 was written in the manner Noth proposes, they would agree that Noth's work demonstrates that the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 can be reasonably derived from existing biblical chronological data. They would agree that there is no reason why the author of 1 Kings 6:1 could not, under inspiration, have used existing chronological data recorded in the book of Judges, along with other sources that we no longer have access to, in reconstructing the 480 year interval. One such plausible reconstruction appears in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary.¹⁷

There are additional reasons for believing that 1 Kings 6:1

provides an accurate record of the time interval between the Exodus and Solomon. For example, the language of 1 Kings 6:1 actually gives the impression of a carefully calculated number. Rather than simply giving the impression of a rounded number by saying it was [about] 480 years from the Exodus to Solomon, the text reads, "In the 480th year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord" (NIV, emphasis added). The author is clearly intending to be quite precise in specifying the exact time.

To the chronological data derived from the various periods in which the judges ruled, can be added information from other texts which testify to the general accuracy of 1 Kings 6:1. For example, Jdgs. 11:26 attributes a statement to Jephthah in which he claims 300 years had passed from the time of Israel's initial occupation of Heshbon and his judgeship. Since it is difficult to date Jephthah much later than ca. 1100 B.C., his 300 year figure for the conquest of Heshbon dates that event to about 1400 B.C.—right in line with the 15th century Exodus-Conquest date.¹⁸

Also, in 1 Chron. 6:33-37, there appears the genealogy of Heman the singer who lived in the time of David. This genealogy places Heman in the eighteenth generation from Korah, who was the head of this family line at the time of the Exodus. As Bimson points out, the passing of the 18 generations listed in this genealogy supports the general accuracy of the 480 years which 1 Kings 6:1 says elapsed from the time of the Exodus until the 4th year of Solomon.¹⁹

Probably the most devastating blow against reducing the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1, however, is that its original *raison d'être*, the 13th century Exodus date, is now rapidly losing support (as we shall see below).²⁰ For liberal scholars who doubt the existence of the Exodus, the question of how to reduce the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 does not even warrant discussion, as several new histories of Israel would suggest.²⁰

In concluding this discussion of 1 Kings 6:1, I would summarize the issue by saying that the original reason for suggesting that the 480 years was artificially contrived by multiplying 12 times 40 appears to have been motivated by a desire to justify the reduction

of this chronological datum in order to make it compatible with the 13th century Exodus theory. However, nothing in the text associates the 480 years with the word generation, nor is there any explicit evidence from Scripture that a generation was understood to be 40 years long.²² These conclusions are drawn only from inference or speculation. The question Thompson's readers must ask is, should theories derived from extra-biblical data (such as the identification of Rameses with the 13th century city of Tanis), which change with each new archaeological discovery or interpretation, control their understanding of the text, or is it wiser to give priority to the text, itself.

The 13th Century Exodus

Turning now to the related question of the viability of the 13th century Exodus date, I would like to point out that there is a fundamental difference between Thompson's Exodus Plans 1 and 3, and his Plan 2. The difference of opinion which exists between advocates of Plans 1 and 3 does not affect the date of the Exodus, so we won't enter into that discussion for now. The date for the Exodus in Plan 2, on the other hand, has no direct support from Scripture (unless one considers a negative assessment of 1 Kings 6:1 as Scriptural support). Rather, it exists only because scholars, again, have imposed an understanding *upon the text*, based on certain interpretations of the archaeological record—a technique that is not considered either good biblical exegesis, or good archaeological methodology.

Importance of Archaeology. Although our author correctly notes that archaeology influences the positions concerning the date (and historicity) of the Exodus, he chooses not to discuss its role; rather, he prefers to deal only with the "ambiguities of the biblical material" (p. 235). However, as noted above, it was really the archaeological data (and poorly interpreted data at that) and historical theories, not "ambiguities" within the biblical text, that were the driving force behind the creation of Plan 2—the 1290 B.C. Exodus date. Because the creation of Plan 2 is a response to a combination of archaeological data and historical theory, it is important to discuss the scholarly context concerning the issue that has become known as the "emergence of Israel."

During the last 30 years, or so, a battle has raged between three competing models for Israel's arrival in Canaan: (1) the military conquest (the 15th and the 13th century dates); (2) the peaceful infiltration; (3) and the indigenous sociological process. The 15th century date had been generally abandoned years before by the majority of scholars, largely because of the preference for the 13th century date based on the arguments described above.

Current Liberal Views on 13th Century Exodus. However, both liberals and conservatives are now denying that there is any evidence for a rapid, unified military Conquest of Palestine in the 13th century as Albright maintained, nor do they believe that Albright's dates for the destruction of most of his key sites used to support the 13th century conquest, are even accurate! For example, J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, both liberal scholars, have outlined three major problems with the archaeological evidence used to support a 13th century Exodus/Conquest:

(1) It is not clear from the artifactual record that these cities were destroyed simultaneously or as the result of a common enemy. Indeed, it cannot be established archaeologically that they were all destroyed by military action. (2) The sites where artifactual remains indicate city destructions at the end of the Late Bronze Age, with a few exceptions (Lachish, Hazor), are not the ones that the biblical account associates with the conquest under Joshua. (3) the sites that are identified with cities which the biblical account does associate with the conquest, on the other hand, usually have produced little or no archaeological indication of even having been occupied during the Late Bronze Age, much less of having been destroyed at the end of the period.²³

Elsewhere Miller has argued that the identification of destruction layers from 13th century B.C. cities with the conquest of the Israelites is at best ambiguous and that it is every bit as likely that they were caused by the Egyptians or some other group.²⁴ Similar criticisms have been noted by H. J. Franken and M. Weippert among others.²⁵

Current Conservative Views on 13th Century Exodus. B. G. Wood, a conservative scholar who did his Ph.D. work on Late Bronze (LB) Age ceramics at the University of Toronto, has undertaken the most recent, detailed analysis of these Palestinian LB-

Iron I destruction layers. He discovered that Albright's "Israelite destruction levels" could not have been destroyed in the single campaign that Albright envisioned. Rather, the destruction levels were found clustered around three chronological horizons spread throughout a 90 year period. The chronological horizons, themselves, are grouped in distinctive geographical regions. The first group of sites were all located in the central, coastal region and were destroyed at the end of the LB IIB1 period probably by pharaoh Merneptah (around 1215-1210 B.C.). The second group of sites were mostly localized along the southwest coastal region and were destroyed at the end of the LB IIB2 probably by the Sea Peoples who invaded this area during the reign of Ramesses III, *ca.* 1165 B.C. The third group of sites are either Egyptian centers in the center of the country or are sites located in the Jordan Valley; although both groups appear to have been destroyed at the end of the Iron IA1 period, (*ca.* 1135-1125 B.C.), the Egyptian centers were probably destroyed by the Philistines, while the Jordan Valley sites were destroyed by earthquake activity. Wood provides additional supportive details that we do not have time to include. All the data, however, lead him to conclude that once "the destruction levels of the Late Bronze-Iron Age transitional period are accurately dated, the evidence for a 13th century conquest largely evaporates."²⁶

With this historical review in mind I now return to Thompson's comments on the three Exodus "plans." In view of what I have described above, the reader can imagine my surprise at our author's inclusion of the 13th century Exodus date as a viable plan that has now gained acceptance even by "scholars holding to inerrancy." Actually support for this position by such scholars was expressed over 25 years ago, and was embraced at that time (as noted above) because it seemed to be the only viable theory that maintained the basic historicity of the Exodus.²⁷ Recently, however the trend is clearly moving away from this position.

Many conservative evangelicals who maintain the historicity of the Exodus-Conquest are now starting to refocus their attention back on a 15th century date (e.g. B. G. Woods, D. Livingstone and J. J. Bimson). My conversations with other non-Adventist conservative scholars indicate that they too prefer a 15th century date.²⁸

Liberal scholars, on the other hand, are almost all divided between only two positions—those who still maintain Alt/Noth's "peaceful infiltration" hypothesis (which radically minimizes the Exodus and virtually eliminates the Conquest), and those who argue there was no Exodus/Conquest at all; that Israel came into existence through an "indigenous sociological" process by which they emerged from the lower classes of the earlier Canaanite society.

Thus, if Thompson rejects 1 Kings 6:1 and a 15th century Exodus date, the only real options he can offer his readers are to deny the traditional Exodus/Conquest and either accept (1) the peaceful infiltration theory of Alt/Noth, (which, itself, is slowly losing ground), or (2) one of the indigenous sociological process theories advocated originally by Mendenhall and Gottwald, but recently endowed with important modifications by scholars such as T. L. Thompson, N. P. Lemche, and R. B. Coote. The latter position is rapidly becoming the new consensus in liberal scholarship.

If, on the other hand, Thompson wants to offer his readers an option that still retains the historicity of the Exodus-Conquest event, the 15th century date option still offers possibilities; the Late Bronze Age is still not well-known archaeologically, and even those who deny an Exodus see evidence that "Israel" (however, they define it) was in the land *prior* to when 13th century advocates would place them there. However, Thompson's 13th century Exodus-Conquest theory (his "Plan 2") lacks any solid archaeological support and is today, increasingly considered untenable.

Amram's Prolific Brothers

8,600 Males in One Generation?

Another concern of Thompson is the case of Amram's prolific brothers. In this case, we have a problem in which Amram and his three brothers are stated to have produced an incredible 8,600 males in one generation (Num. 3:27).

However, I would suggest that the "problem" is, itself, the result of a too "casual" look at the text. It makes certain assumptions about the text without proper allowance for what we don't know. These assumptions are that the 8,600 male sons of Num. 3:27 were produced in one generation, that the head of the Amramite clan was the same person as Moses' father, and that there were no

additional "sons of Kohath." Certainly, a "casual" reading of the text might leave one with that impression. But there are scholars who have subjected these texts to additional analysis and are not so certain that this casual reading is correct.

The Number of Amram's Brothers

Turning first to the question of the number of Amram's brothers, there are several reasons (biblical and otherwise) for assuming that Amram had more than the three brothers (Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel) mentioned in Num. 3:27. That Amram's father had only four sons in an age when very large families were the norm would, in itself, seem strange. Indeed, a possible additional "son" of Kohath named Amminadab is mentioned in 1 Chron. 6:22. There could have been many other additional brothers, but because of their lack of prominence they are not mentioned. Nevertheless, their progeny could have been included within the clans of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel (it is possible that the families of less prominent brothers "merged" with the families of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel and were thus numbered among the members of these four families). However, to be fair, even if Amram had a considerably higher number of brothers than indicated in Num. 3:27, etc. it would not likely eliminate the problem of 8600 male offspring in one generation. Therefore, there are other factors that scholars have considered.

Moses' Real Parents

Some scholars have questioned whether Amram and Jochebed were Moses' biological parents. For example, Egyptologist K.A. Kitchen argues that the statement "Jochebed bore to (Amram) Aaron and Moses" in Ex. 6:20 "does not prove immediate descent." To support this claim Kitchen cites Gen. 46:16-18 where the children that Zipah "bore" to Jacob clearly include great-grandsons. Thus, Kitchen would maintain that several additional generations existed between Amram and Moses.²⁹

This conclusion, in turn, implies that some of the genealogical lists in the Bible are abbreviated, a point Thompson also argues for (p. 231). However, the presence of abbreviated genealogical lists presents no problems, in my opinion, to the integrity of the biblical text.³⁰ This was a perfectly acceptable practice in antiquity, a fact

well established from ethnographic studies of modern Near Eastern societies, as well as from studies of ancient genealogical records.³¹ There were a variety of reasons as to why this was done, however, most scholars recognize that the omission of names from a genealogy does not make them non-factual or unusable. As Aufrecht notes, "It is inaccurate to say that these genealogies do not represent reliable facts."³² The key is to identify the type and purpose of the genealogy and to ascertain the reasons the names were omitted before attempting to see the genealogy's place in terms of history.

However, more important than the question of whether abbreviated genealogies are attested in non-biblical sources, is the fact that comparisons of various biblical genealogies with each other show that the biblical writers also followed this accepted practice. For example, Matt. 1:8 says that "Joram [was] the father of Uzziah," while 2 Kings 8:25; 11:2; and 14 make it clear that Joram was actually the father of Ahaziah, who was the father of Joash, who was the father of Amaziah, who was the father of Uzziah. Matthew left out three generations in his genealogy. Similarly 1 Kings 19:15 and 2 Kings 9:20 suggest that Jehu was the son of Nimshi, while 2 Kings 9:2 informs us that Jehu was actually the *grandson* of Nimshi.³³

Two Amrams

Some scholars have raised an additional question about whether the "Amram" of Num. 3:27 and 1 Chron. 6:3 was the same individual mentioned in Exod. 6:20 as Moses' actual father, contrary to the usual assumption. There is no doubt that a casual reading of these texts would lead to this conclusion. (In fact, this is the position taken in the SDA Bible Commentary; see on Exod. 6:20). However, it is equally possible that there were two Amrams; one was the ancestral eponym of Moses' family clan, and the other was Moses' literal father.³⁴ The reoccurrence of a favored ancestral name is, in fact, a common practice which is well-attested in Scripture. To note just one example, Heman the Kohathite lists *three* Elkanahs in his genealogy (1 Chron. 6:33-38).

The Real Problem

What is the answer to the "problem" of Amram's brothers? I would have to say that based on the lack of definitive information,

we simply don't know. The last two proposed interpretations discussed above would eliminate the problem, and in my opinion, would do so without violating the integrity of Scripture. Without additional information, however, we are not even sure there is a "problem" to begin with.

The 400 Years of Genesis 15:13-16

Only Four "Generations" in 400 Years

A similar and related "problem" mentioned to that of Amram's prolific brothers is the 400 years of Gen. 15:13-16. Thompson writes,

Some have suggested that the 400 years was a round number arrived at by multiplying an average length of a generation (taken to be 100 years) by four, representing the four names in 1 Chronicles 6:1-3—Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses, (p. 233).

The problem in this case is having only four generations spread out over 400 years. Either there are missing generations, or the time reference is not reliable.

More than Four Generations Involved

We have already discussed the possibility of abbreviated genealogies above and have not found them to be a problem. The author, himself, notes that lists for other branches of Israel's (Jacob's) family, found in 1 Chron. 2:1-20 and 1 Chron. 7:23-27, indicate two different total numbers of generations for the 400 year sojourn in Egypt, seven and twelve respectively (p. 232). This is not at all surprising, and, indeed, is to be expected. Each family branch reproduces its next generation at its own rate. After four hundred years some families would be expected to have produced more generations than others. Another example of this occurs later in 1 Chron. 6: 33-44 where the genealogies of three different families who provided musicians for the tabernacle in David's time, are listed from that time back to Levi. There were 23 generations between Heman the Kohathite and Levi, 15 generations between Asaph and Levi, and 14 generations between Ethan the Merarite and Levi. It would not be surprising if a few names were left out of some of these lists while others were added. This possibility is evident if one compares these lists with those given earlier in 1

Chron. 6:16-30 (if the latter were intended to reflect the same lineage). Nevertheless, each list is accurate within the context for which it was written.

Does *dor* Mean "Generations?"

However, there are some additional comments that can be made in relation to Gen. 15:13-16 pertaining to the idea that the 400 year figure was derived from multiplying an artificial generation of 100 years times the four individuals mentioned in 1 Chron. 6:1-3. To begin with, it should first be noted that there is some question among scholars as to whether the Hebrew word in this passage, *dor*, should even be translated as "generations." According to Albright,

Gen. 15:13-16 has been generally misunderstood; the word *dor* did not mean "generation" in early Hebrew, but "lifetime," like Etruscan—Roman *saeculum*; the Arabic cognate *dahrūn* often means "lifetime" (originally "cycle"), Syriac *dara* is defined as "80 years," and the word *darum* appears in an inscription of Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria also in the meaning "lifetime" (several *daru* elapsed between the climax of the empire of Accad and his own reign, i.e. between c. 2250 and c. 1750 B.C.). In verse 13 the equivalent of four lifetimes is explicitly given as "400 years."³⁵

A number of other scholars, such as E. A. Speiser,³⁶ and K. A. Kitchen,³⁷ have adopted a similar interpretation of *dor*. The unlikelihood of a single generation lasting 100 years (scholars like M. Noth would suggest the average generation was closer to 20 years, similar to today) suggests that this "lifetime" interpretation of *dor* is more plausible.

A Tie Between 1 Chronicles 6 and Genesis 15?

Secondly, there is nothing explicit in the text that requires the four names of 1 Chronicles 6:1-3 to be tied to the four "generations" of Gen. 15:13-16 (although this is often assumed). Rather, it seems more likely that if *dor* means "lifespan" or "duration," "age," "time span," then the *actual* number of *biological* generations that occurred during this period was considerably greater than four; indeed, if one follows M. Noth, then one could argue that each lifespan would cover as many as five generations. Because of the

possibility that the biblical genealogies were abbreviated we once again can not be sure that Gen. 15:13-16 is even a problem.

Universal vs. Local Flood

Local Flood

One final area that has raised a few questions are the author's comments on the flood. The author states:

Those familiar with modern trends know that the pervasive scholarly view, except among some conservative Christians, is that the account of the Flood in Genesis has its roots in a more localized event.

One could argue, of course, as many Christians do, that the primary concern of the Flood story is to pass judgment on human sin. For the moral to stand out sharp and clear, one does not necessarily need to argue for a *universal* flood." (p. 229).

This statement is (unintentionally I'm sure) a bit misleading because there are really at least three facets to the question of whether or not the flood was local. The first is what the author of Genesis *intended* to depict, and the second is did it *really* happen; a third, of course is what scholars *believe* happened. Since most Bible-believing Christians accept the second point, I will limit my comments to points 1 and 3.

Scholarly Attitudes toward a Universal Flood

Dealing with the third point first, it is, of course, no surprise that consensus scholarship, especially within the disciplines of biology, paleontology, and geology, does not accept the idea of a universal flood. The anti-supernatural presuppositions of the "scientific method" preclude the possibility of divine causation for a geological event.

There is, of course, a minority of scientists who believe there is evidence to support the occurrence of such an event in earth's history. Adventists scientists have generally been counted among this group. Nevertheless, the majority of biblical scholars have accepted the conclusions of evolutionary science on this point and, therefore, deny that the geological record contains any evidence for a worldwide flood.

The Genesis Author's Intentions

However, there is a bit more division on the first point about what the author of Genesis intended to convey. Even "liberal" scholars can be counted among those who believe the biblical author *intended* to describe a universal flood. These scholars just happen to believe that Moses (or rather the hypothetical "J" and "P" authors of the flood account) was wrong. For example, in his introduction to Genesis 1 G. von Rad wrote, "What is said here is intended to hold true entirely and exactly as it stands. Nowhere at all is the text only allusive, 'symbolic,' or figuratively poetic."³⁸ (Von Rad, of course, would not for a moment have actually *believed* the biblical author's *intention*).

The Need for a Universal Flood

Keeping the idea of the biblical author's *intention* in mind I would like to turn to the rather curious and even suprising comment that Thompson makes with regard to the extent of the flood.

That is his statement that "For the moral [of the flood story] to stand out sharp and clear, one does not necessarily need to argue for a *universal* flood." Having already noted that many leading scholars (including "liberals") believe the Genesis author *intended* to convey a universal flood, how important is the idea of universality to the theological point of the story?

Universal Themes. Many scholars recognize that Genesis 1-11 is a literary unit that was intended to serve as a primeval history for Israel, and, indeed, the whole world. Even those scholars who argue Genesis was a "late scissors and paste job" allow this.³⁹ Thus, the entire section of Genesis 1-11 can be seen as universal in scope. The creation account is not the creation of Israel, but of the whole world. The story of the Fall is not the fall of some of mankind, but of all mankind. Redemption (and the covenant) is not offered to a few, but to *all*. The genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and the "Table of Nations" of Genesis 10 are generally understood as *intending* to depict the origins of all mankind—the whole antediluvian world from Adam, and the post-diluvial world from Noah. And the flood, which was *intended* to be a judgment, was against all mankind, not just a partial judgment.

Universal language. Not only does the entire context of Gen-

esis 1-11 argue for the universality of the flood, but the specific language in the flood narrative, itself, is clearly all inclusive. Unique phrases such as "the face of all the earth" in Gen. 7:2 and 8:8 are identical to those which appear in the (universal) creation narrative in Gen. 1:29. Other phrases such as "every living thing" (Gen. 6:19; 7:4, 23), "under the whole heaven" (Gen. 7:19; see also Exod. 17:14 and Deut. 4:19), "all flesh" (Gen. 7:15, etc.) clearly indicate universality.⁴⁰ It has been said that if the author of Genesis had wanted to depict a world wide flood he would have been hard put to have found more adequate language than that which he used.

The Local Flood Theory

It is, of course, possible to argue that the author of Genesis did have in mind some local flood which he "expanded" into a universal flood, in order to create a "symbol" for his story. But which local flood?

Archaeological Evidence? Flooding was quite common along the rivers in ancient Mesopotamia and archaeological fieldwork in that region has turned up evidence for inundations at numerous sites including Ur, Kish, Uruk, Lagash, Shuruppak, Nineveh, Dar i Khazineh.⁴¹ Indeed, there are so many "flood" strata that earlier scholars couldn't agree which, if any, was "the" flood.

Closer examination of these flood strata, however, has led most people to abandon the idea that any of these represented "the" Flood.⁴² For one thing, none of the flood layers is particularly extensive; some don't even cover the entire settlement. In addition to this, geological studies indicate that the deposits in question were apparently laid down slowly in deep, quiet water action; not by catastrophic flooding. This uncertainty led Assyriologist Georges Roux to state that "archaeological excavations in Iraq have afforded no evidence of the cataclysmic Deluge."⁴³ Quite frankly, I must agree with these scholars that it is difficult to see how any of these fairly regular local floods could have grabbed the imagination of ancient man.

Post-glacial Period Evidence? Failure to find evidence of the flood within the archaeological record has encouraged some to suggest that the flood be pushed back into Pleistocene or earlier times.⁴⁴ Advocates of this position still generally hold to a local

flood, albeit on a larger scale than the Assyriologists have advocated. Thus, they have examined the geological record of Mesopotamia for evidence of the flood right after the Ice Age. This has resulted in the "Glacial Melt Theory," which suggests that there was some catastrophic flooding associated with the end of the Ice Age.

However, there are a number of problems with the Glacial Melt Theory. First of all, it does not harmonize with either the biblical description of the flood, itself, nor does it agree with the universal aspects that the text requires. Moreover the written descriptions clearly associate "the Flood" with rain, not river inundations.⁴⁶

Second, the geological evidence of a Pleistocene flood in the area of the Persian Gulf is uncertain. While there seems to be no doubt that the sea level in this area rose significantly after the Ice Age, the rapidity of the flooding and its geological impact are largely conjecture at this point.⁴⁶

Third, I can not see how a local Pleistocene flood, even if it were of a catastrophic nature, would have made the significant impact that would have been necessary to have been preserved and eventually recorded by the later Mesopotamians in their flood stories. The age problem is beyond the scope of our present discussion, but regardless of how one dates the Pleistocene period, the archaeological data indicate that human society during this time consisted of a non-sedentary, "hunter-gatherer" society in which groups of people would have been mobile and fairly well scattered. Indeed, their camp sites appear all over the Middle East. Large population concentrations don't occur until the so-called "Neolithic revolution."⁴⁷ Thus, even a major flood in the lower Mesopotamian flood plain would not have overtaken any major concentrations of human beings during this period, and even if a large number of people were somehow caught up in this disaster, the majority of the population would have been unaffected.

Additional Problems with the Local Flood Theory. There are additional items within the flood narrative itself, that contradict a local inundation including details such as the waters rising "over the tops of the mountains" (Gen. 7:19). If the flood were local and recent in geological history, then it must be assumed that the mountains which were covered by the flood waters were the same

ones which exist in Mesopotamia today (i.e. the "mountains of Ararat" which are specifically mentioned). However, the Zagros range which parallels the Mesopotamian river valley to the north-east, has peaks that reach from 8,000 to 11,500 ft in elevation;⁴⁸ if the author of Genesis actually did intend to say that the flood covered all the mountains in their region, the waters would have been high enough to cover the whole world anyway!

Another curiosity, if a local flood was intended, is why the biblical author bothers with saving the animals on the ark. Animals from the surrounding regions where the flood did not reach, could easily have moved into the flooded area and repopulated the devastated region once the flood waters had subsided; local floods were well-known in ancient Mesopotamia (as is evident from the local flood strata at numerous sites), and the people would have been quite aware of how animals repopulate an area after inundation. Clearly, the flood in the biblical account (and other ancient flood stories) were viewed on a much larger scale than what the ancients were familiar with. In short, an ark is unnecessary in a local flood story. It seems more likely that the ancients clearly understood the flood to be worldwide.

A related point is the size of the ark. Water craft were well-known to the ancients, particular in Mesopotamia where the inhabitants built boats to travel up and down the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. Even ocean travel was known from early times, through the Persian Gulf to India, etc. Yet, the dimensions of the ark are completely out of line with the typical water craft of those times (its dimensions are similar to one of the WW II U.S. battle-ships). Clearly the ark was to survive in waters much more violent and extensive then what the ancients were used to experiencing on the Mesopotamian rivers.

Two more points might be mentioned. First, the fact that all the flood traditions, the Sumero-Babylonian as well as biblical, depict the cause of the flood as *rainfall*, not river inundation, is contrary to what the local people in Mesopotamia would have been familiar with. Second, the flood traditions clearly extend beyond the Mesopotamian flood plain into regions which would not typically experience floods.⁴⁹

A final implication of the Local Flood Theory is that it leaves

conservative Christians without an explanation for the formation of the fossil-bearing geologic column other than conventional geology's gradual processes which require millions of years. Not only does this pose a conflict with the biblical account of creation and its chronological data⁶⁰ (and it should be noted that no matter which textual tradition one uses—LXX, MT, etc.—none support long ages; also, while some may quibble over Ellen G. White's "6,000 year" statements, there is no doubt she explicitly denied millions of years), it also creates the theological dilemma of having millions of years of animal life (and death) *before* the creation of humans (who appear late in the geologic column, near the top). This latter dilemma is especially highlighted in the book of Romans where we are informed that the biblical cause of "death" is "sin" (Rom. 5:12), the biblical cause of "sin" is mankind (Rom. 5:12), and that mankind's sin also affected the entire creation (Rom. 8:19-21). While some among us may be comfortable with the idea of death in the animal kingdom prior to mankind's creation (and fall), most probably will not.

Our Real Alternatives

It is clear from the above, that the author of Genesis intended to depict a worldwide flood. I can not really see how responsible exegesis could come to any other conclusion and there are both liberal and conservative scholars who would agree. However, while liberal scholars who do not view the Genesis account as inspired can easily separate the author's *intentions* from "what really happened," conservatives who believe this account to be an inspired revelation from God about what *really happened* will take the author's intentions more seriously.

There are those who hold out for the historicity of the flood, but want to restrict it to a local inundation. However, as we have seen, this approach is not without problems. It not only flies in the face of the biblical (and extra-biblical) text, it really has no persuasive archaeological or geological support. The only other option is to deny the historicity of the flood all together and suggest that the flood is purely "symbolic." But this leads us into situation in which we are forced to appeal to external authorities in order to determine which biblical accounts are historic and which are only symbolic.

The real "hard question" that Thompson doesn't ask is: are Bible-believing Christians really willing to take this path?

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the beginning, this paper is not intended to give final answers, or even complete ones, to the points Thompson has raised. Much more could be said on each topic and there are many issues I did not have time to address. Indeed, all of these issues are actually much more involved than what one might gather from Thompson's chapter. At the same time, I believe it is important to let readers know that there are other viewpoints, sometimes even from liberal scholarship, that indicate that some "problems" in the biblical text are not quite so serious as they might appear to be at first.

With all due respect to our author, I would suggest that one of the weaknesses of the book is that it falls short in its attempt to present complex subjects, which scholars have debated for generations, to a lay audience. There is no doubt that Thompson writes well. His style is easy to read, witty, almost conversational, and at the same time he comes across as authoritative. However, a great deal of the critical information has been left out that is essential for the reader to be able to draw an informed conclusion.

Also, as I pointed out at the beginning, many of the problems Thompson discusses arise from certain interpretations and assumptions that are external to the biblical text. Large numbers would not be a problem if they did not contradict our modern rational sense. I doubt there would be any question about the historicity and dating of the Exodus if it were not for certain archaeological findings (or their absence!) and certain presuppositions about the biblical text. And the understanding that the author of Genesis intended to describe a universal flood would probably not be questioned if it were not for the findings of modern geology and paleontology. These are not problems that arise from the text so much as they are problems which we impose upon the text from outside. The question we must ask is should we allow such external factors to control our understanding of the text. Many "problems," such as Amram's prolific brothers, may arise simply because the text apparently does not give us all the information we might like.

The little information we do have can seem, on the surface, to be uncertain and even contradictory. This uncertainty, however, leads me to a final point that I believe should be made concerning the biblical text. On the last page of Thompson's chapter (p. 236) he raises the question as to whether it is possible for a friend (in this case Scripture) to make a mistake (such as the case of Amram's genealogy and/or the numbers of his progeny) and still retain our confidence. In general, I would say his point is well taken. However, there is another aspect of friendship that Thompson does not mention. That is, to be willing to give your friend the benefit of the doubt when questions arise by not prematurely jumping to negative conclusions, especially when they are based on so little data. I believe Scripture deserves no less.

Endnotes

1 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages, Vol. 1*, (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 16.

2 For a recent popular article which describes current scholarship's skepticism regarding the historicity of the Exodus and the Conquest see N.A. Silberman, "Who Were the Israelites?" *Archaeology* March/April (1992), pp. 22-30.

3 C. R. Lepsius, *Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Peninsula of Sinai...With extracts from the chronology of the Egyptians, with reference to the Exodus of the Israelites*, trans. L. and J. B. Horner, (Bohn's Antiquarian Library, 1849); F. J. Champas, *Recherches pour servir à l'histoire de la XIX dynastie et spécialement à celle des temps de l'Exode* (1873); E. Naville "Exodus," *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol I (1893), pp. 1023 ff.; A.H. Sayce, *The Early History of the Hebrews* (1897), p. 158.

4 T. H. Robinson, *History of Israel*, (1932). p 79. Robinson's statement is nicely illustrated by the famous Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie who, in writing of the 15th century Exodus date said that it was a position that "is flatly contrary to the known history. For the names of the store city Raamses, and the district 'land of Rameses,' show that the period must be after Rameses II (1300-1234 B.C.)." F. Petrie, *Egypt and Israel* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911), p. 37.

5 Scholars were uncertain, however, as to what the 12 and 40 referred to. C. F. Burney, suggested that rather than 12 "generations" the number 12 referred to 12 "national leaders" to whom the author of 1 Kings 6:1 attributed standardized periods of leadership of 40 years each. The twelve most significant leaders who Rowley believed spanned this period were Moses, Joshua, Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak (counted as one), Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David. See C. F. Burney, *Israel's Settlement in Canaan: The Biblical Tradition and its Historical Background*, pp. 4 ff.; H. H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua*. (London: The British Academy, 1950), p. 98.

6 F. Petrie, *Egypt and Israel*, pp. 55 ff. Petrie later modified the 210 years

between the Exodus and Solomon to 264 years, based on a generation of 22 years each, although he still argued for a 1220 B.C. date. See F. Petrie, *Palestine and Egypt*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1934), p. 54.

7 See J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (3rd ed.), (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 123.

8 See J. W. Jack, *Dating the Exodus*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), p. 210. It should be pointed out that Jack also held that the 480 years might be derived from multiplying 12 times 40. However, he believed that the 40 year time span for a generation could not be reduced as Petrie and others had done. Jack concluded that the 480 years roughly represented the actual time span from Solomon to the Exodus, and accordingly dated the Exodus to the 15th century B.C.

9 W. F. Albright, "Archaeology and the Date of the Hebrew conquest of Palestine, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 58 (1935), p. 17.

10 There is no indication from Scripture, itself, that the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 was derived from multiplying 12 generations of 40 years each, nor is there any indication that Biblical peoples considered a generation to consist of 40 years. It is true that the numbers 12 and 40 occur frequently in different contexts and scholars have debated what the significance of these numbers might have had. L. R. Bailey writes on the number *forty*,

"Why *forty* should have been singled out is more difficult to discover. It is often thought to have been an approximation for the average length of a generation, perhaps based upon the statement that certain figures married at this age (Gen 25:20; 26:34) or that an entire generation died during Israel's forty-year journey in the wilderness. In actuality, however there is evidence that the average lifespan was only thirty to forty years. Often the number seems to be used [as] a "round" figure for any fairly long distance or period of time."

While Bailey has some interesting suggestions for the meaning of *forty*, they are clearly speculative. His point that the lifespans in biblical times were as short as 30-40 years supports Noth's belief that the length of a generation must have been around 20 years, perhaps even slightly less. It might be possible that some numbers were rounded, but this is by no means certain in every case. Nevertheless, the assumption that 480 years is not literal is made only because the number strikes some individuals as "artificial" or "contrived" (it should be noted that the 325 year figure from the Exodus to the Temple that 13th century advocates argue for is equally contrived). See L.R. Bailey, *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition*, (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 200.

11 Jack, *Dating*, p. 206. W. F. Albright and others, however, denied that *dor* meant "generation." Rather, they argued that this word meant "lifetime" and typically represented around a 100 years (see discussion, above on Gen. 15:13-16).

12 See W. F. Albright, *Cambridge Ancient History*, II:33 (1966), p. 39; J. Bright, *History*, p. 123.

13 See J. J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Press, 1981) pp. 81-84 for a convenient listing of some of the references.

14 M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, (2nd ed.), (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Press, 1991), p. 36 n. 1. See also pp. 37, 43. Besides the fact that there is no explicit evidence that a generation was understood in biblical times to be 40 years (more reasonable estimates are about 25 years), there is nothing in the text which states or even implies the idea of twelve generations. See J. J. Davis, *Moses*

and the Gods of Egypt, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), p. 35; and G. Archer, *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), p. 192.

16 Ironically, Noth actually assigned the Exodus event broadly to the 13th century. See M. Noth *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960) p. 120. However, for Noth the Exodus event was largely irrelevant to early Israelite history since he believed only a very small group had ever been in Egypt. Rather, Noth held that most of the people who "became" Israel were semi-nomads who peacefully migrated into Canaan sometime during the second half of the 14th century B.C.—a hundred and fifty years earlier than the time advocated by the "late Exodus" theorists.

16 According to Noth, Dtr. was extremely interested in history and chronology and, therefore, attempted to supply an unbroken chronology for Israel's history using "on the whole reliable sources" (p. 34). Thus, Noth maintained that as Dtr. was writing his history he became aware that the chronological data he had before him from various "earlier accounts" and traditions indicated that Solomon's temple had actually been founded 480 years after the Exodus. The fact that "this was the only time when such a round sum total made up of the separate periods emerged 'by chance'" prompted Dtr. to draw "deliberate attention to this important fact" in 1 Kgs. 6:1. Noth, *Deuteronomistic*, p. 34-36.

17 F.D. Nichol (ed.), "The Ancient World from c. 1400 to 586 B.C." in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol 2 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1972), pp. 34-36. A point that should be noted about all these reconstructions, there are a couple of stretches of time during the period of the Judges for which the Bible does not provide precise chronological data. This has led to a variety of suggestions of how the biblical data can be put together to total the 480 years. While there are several possible configurations, insufficient data from the biblical text has precluded a conclusive decision. Nevertheless, the biblical data which do exist unanimously point to a time span considerably longer than the interval proposed by advocates of the 13th century date. For some of the various suggestions on how the 480 years might be derived from the book of Judges see Bimson, *Redating*, pp. 81-84 (although Bimson provides a negative assessment).

18 For additional comments that support the accuracy of Jephthah's comments see Davis, *Moses*, pp. 35, 36. With reference to my combining the Exodus-Conquest events, I am assuming that if Thompson would allow the possibility of a 13th century Exodus, he would also hold to a subsequent Conquest in that same century.

19 Bimson, *Redating*, p. 77.

20 For conservatives who still hold to the historicity of the Exodus, it must be pointed out that the reasons the early Egyptologists had for shortening the 480 years of 1 Kgs. 6:1, are no longer compelling (not that they ever were). For example, the traditional identification of Per-Rameses with Tanis (which is now known to have been built after the time of Rameses II) has now been generally abandoned in favor of Khatana-Qantir Tell ed-Daba, a site to the south of Tanis. Current excavations at the new site have occupational evidence, not only from the time of Rameses II, but also from the earlier Hyksos period. Thus, it is not impossible that Hebrew slaves could have been working in the area prior to the 13th century.

As to why Ex. 1:11 says the Hebrews built "the city of Rameses," which was apparently named after a 13th century pharaoh, the answer may simply be an

updating of a place name from an older pre-13th century name. This practice is known elsewhere in Scripture, the best example being Gen. 14:14 where we are told that Abraham pursued his enemies to the city of Dan, yet Jos. 19:47 and Jdgs 18:29 indicate that this city was actually called Laish in Abraham's time. Thus, the recording of a 13th century city name in Ex. 1:11 does not mean that the Israelites could not have been building in the area earlier, in harmony with the 1 Kings 6:1 chronology.

21 For example, neither Coote, nor Lemche even mention 1 Kings 6:1 in their histories. See R.B. Coote, *Early Israel: A New Horizon*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988).

22 See Bimson, *Redating*, pp. 77, 88.

23 J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 72.

24 J. M. Miller, "Archaeology and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan: Some Methodological Observations," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 109 (1977), pp. 87-93.

25 Franken, H.J. "Palestine in the Time of the Nineteenth Dynasty, (b) Archaeological Evidence", revd. CAH (Vol II, ch/26b, fasc. 67 (1968); Weippert, M., "The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine, trans. J.D. Martin (1971), London.

26 B. G. Wood "The Palestinian Evidence for a Thirteenth Century Conquest: An Archaeological Appraisal", (A paper presented at the Exodus Symposium, Memphis, April 25, 1985).

Albright originally argued for two "conquests" although he later emphasized only one in the latter part of the 13th century B.C.

27 As conservative scholars witnessed the controversy between Albright's "American School" which argued for a military conquest, and the German school, which denied one, the conservatives were naturally more attracted to Albright's apparent dramatic evidence for the historicity of the conquest. Therefore, it is not surprising that many conservative scholars latched on to Albright's position for dear life, as it were. Adjusting one's interpretation on the chronological data in Judges and 1 Kings 6:1 probably seemed a small price to pay for saving the basic historicity of this crucial biblical event! Thus, many well respected conservatives adopted both Albright's archaeological interpretations as well as his interpretations of the Biblical data. These scholars included individuals like R. K. Harrison and K.A. Kitchen. See K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1966), pp.57-75; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 174-177.

28 It is interesting, in this regard, that D. J. Wiseman, a strong evangelical ally of 13th century advocates K. Kitchen, and A. Millard, recently co-edited a new Bible Atlas with J. J. Bimson which argues for the 15th century date.

29 K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1966) pp. 38, 39, 54, 55. It should be noted, however, that Ellen White seems to have understood that Amram and Jochebed were Moses' actual parents (see Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 242).

30 Thompson says that "the ancients did not use genealogies in the same way that we do" (p. 225). He then goes on to demonstrate how certain biblical genealogies have "gaps." The biblical "problem" I assume Thompson is trying to highlight here is that we can not always "take the Bible as it reads." In my opinion,

however this leaves an unnecessarily negative impression about the Bible's reliability. If it is understood that abbreviating genealogies for specific purposes was an acceptable practice in antiquity (as noted in my discussion above), then proper reading of the biblical text will factor this practice in. Again, it should be pointed out that we are not dependent upon extra-biblical information for this phenomenon, although this material can be helpful. It can be discerned easily by comparing various biblical genealogies with others (Scripture with Scripture). The purpose of any given genealogy can generally be determined by context.

31 There is actually an extensive amount of literature on ancient genealogies beyond Thompson's reference to Geraty's 1974 article. Most of the pioneering research has been conducted by sociologists and anthropologists, although a number of Biblical scholars have attempted to apply the findings to their field. Foremost among these are R.R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975) 169-89; idem, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University, 1977); idem, "Between 'Azel' and 'Azel' Interpreting the biblical Genealogies," *Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (1979) 11-22; T.J. Prewitt, "Kinship Structures and the Genesis Genealogies," *Journal of the Near Eastern Society* 40 (1981) 87-98; J.W. Flanagan, "Genealogy and Dynasty in the Early Monarchy of Israel and Judah," *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982) 23-28. W. Aufrecht, "Genealogy and History in Ancient Israel," *Ascribe to the Lord* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 205-235. However, it should be noted that much of the genealogical material in the bible has been interpreted within a historical critical framework. For the chronological significance of the Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, see note 50, below.

32 Aufrecht, "Genealogy" p. 218.

33 See Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, pp. 36-39 for additional examples from both biblical and extra-biblical material.

34 See J. J. Davis, *Moses*, p. 86.

35 W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 9.

36 E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 51, 113.

37 Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, pp. 53-56.

38 G. von Rad, *Genesis*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1961), p. 45.

39 E.g. M. Miller and J. Hayes, *History*, pp. 54 ff.

40 For a detailed analysis and discussion of the universal nature of the terminology in the Genesis flood account see G. F. Hasel, "Some Issues Regarding the Nature and Universality of the Genesis Flood Narrative," *Origins* 5 (1978): 83-98.

41 Bailey, *Noah*, pp. 28-31.

42 *Ibid.* p. 35.

43 G. Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 114; see also von Rad, *Genesis*, 120.

44 Bailey, *Noah*, p. 38; Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, p. 114.

45 Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, p. 114.

46 For a Pleistocene flood in the Persian Gulf see W. S. Olson, "Has Science Dated the Biblical Flood," *Zygon* 2(1967): 272-78.

47 For a convenient summary of Post-pleistocene archaeology see A. Sherratt, "The Beginnings of Agriculture in the Near East and Europe," in *The*

Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology, ed. A. Sherratt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 112-119.

48 Further to the northwest the mountains get even higher. The traditional Ararat, located in modern Turkey, is 17,000 ft high.

49 Flood geologists believe that these mountains did not exist before the flood, but were created during the last stages of the flood—true pre-flood mountains were much lower.

50 For the chronological significance of the Genesis 5 and 11 genealogies see G. Hasel, "The Meaning of Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," *Origins* 7(1980): 53-70; G. Hasel, "Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the Biblical History of Beginnings," *Origins* 7(1980): 23-37.

REFLECTIONS ON THE AUTHORITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF SCRIPTURE

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Recently a student friend (*see end of paper) of mine and I discussed the question of the Bible, its trustworthiness, and authority. While we were discussing the Bible's reliability and the remarkable accuracy of its transmission through the centuries, he challenged me with what he considered to be "insurmountable" evidence of some errors and blatant contradictions in the Bible.

"I wouldn't call them errors or mistakes" he told me, "because for some people these words are 'red flags.' But, I have slowly come to a more open and flexible understanding of the nature of inspiration and the character of Scripture. You see, the Bible isn't inspired in every jot and tittle. Just look at the evidence."

Taking a breath, he pursued his line of argument, "The way New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament in order to 'prove' their point is more of an *eisegesis* [reading into the text of what is not there] rather than *exegesis* [reading out of the text what it really contains]. They are imaginative constructions, 'pious fictions' if you please."

By that time my student friend was quite excited and I was left with an increasing feeling that in his view those who do not see it his way are only naive and uninformed Bible-believing Adventists. "The Bible is not a book that has fallen from heaven just like that,"

he hammered away. "If you look at the surrounding nations of Israel you will quickly discover many similarities and parallels with Scripture. Through the results of the scientific study of the Bible we are now in a position to know that many points just are not as simple as we were once told. The scientific study of the Scriptures and the surrounding nations of the ancient world has shown that there is a close dependence of the Bible on surrounding thought patterns. Some historical data in the Bible is not as exact as it is sometimes believed to be. If you will only look at the creation account or the laws that are recorded in the Pentateuch, you will find that the Bible has taken over some of the thought patterns by borrowing from its neighbors. And much of the world view of the ancient Near East or Greek gnosticism is to be found in the Bible."

By that time I must have looked somewhat surprised, and even a bit astonished, by what he was saying. Because he sensed some sort of "strange expression" on my face, he, therefore, immediately continued to assure me that what he had just said "does not mean that we can't trust the Bible anymore! You see, through a painful process I have come to the point where I can now see the diversity of Scripture (by this he obviously meant the numerous contradictions and inaccuracies) not as something threatening or disturbing but as something fruitful and challenging."

He tried to convince me that "the pluralism we find in Scripture will aid us in accepting and dealing with theological pluralism in our church and surroundings today. In the same way that the early church responded creatively and imaginatively to new cultural and missionary challenges in New Testament times by changing some Old Testament laws and practices with the changing times and circumstances (for instance the food laws with the clean and unclean distinction),¹ we are called to make changes when our different culture and circumstances call for it. Many of the laws in the Bible were given after all for the ancient people who lived then and these laws often make little sense today if we try to apply them strictly according to the letter."

"Just take the practice of the New Testament writers, for example. The way they quote passages from the Old Testament as proof of fulfillment that Jesus is the Christ (and other things) is often completely out of context. You must have noticed this your-

self. Take Matthew's quotation of Hosea 11:1-3 as an example (cf. Matt. 2:14-15). They took much freedom in applying Old Testament passages freely 'as the Spirit moved them' so that a **new** liberating reinterpretation could emerge. After all, the letter kills but the spirit brings life. This is what makes Jesus so radically different from everything that was before. The passage in Matt. 2:14-15 is a good example for showing how creatively [or did he mean arbitrarily?] the New Testament writers used Scripture to make their point. If they applied Scripture so innovatively to their new situation in their own context and setting, then we should not hesitate to use Scripture just as liberally today to speak meaningfully to our needs and problems that face us as a church in our particular context and setting. This way Scripture truly is transformed, translated from one culture into another, and made relevant to our situation and time."

As I tried to think through the implications of what I had just heard, my friend went on to explain: "The Bible is not a once-and-for all determining codebook that we just have to open to find the answer for our problems. It is more like a casebook where we try to extract some eternal principles which we apply as effectively as we possibly are able to in our rapidly changing time and situation. The messages of the Bible were given to real people in concrete situations. Therefore, it is quite understandable that the content of the Bible is situation-conditioned, reflecting the historical and cultural conditions and limitations of past times. God meets people where they are. He condescends to their level of understanding, to their culture, and to their time. He accommodates Himself. Once we have come to recognize this, we can see and read the Bible with different eyes. We don't have to choose an either/or position. We don't have to conclude that the Bible is either literally true in everything or it is entirely false, and, therefore, we have to throw it out all together. Doing so would be shortsighted."

My friend revealed, "I have increasingly come to believe that the question whether something is true or not does not depend on whether a statement is literally true or not; whether it conveys accurate historical facts in all its details or not, or whether it is always true and correct in all it asserts. A single error should not lead anyone to the fateful conclusion that the Bible contains no

truth at all." Then my friend used some analogies: "Just take my marriage as an example, if I find my spouse wrong in one point, I would be completely mistaken to jump to the conclusion that I can't trust her on any matter anymore. Or take poetry, for instance, or a piece of literature like Milton's 'Paradise Lost.' Even though the latter does not convey actual 'history,' it nevertheless exerts a great power. The power of transformation really is what finally counts. What good does the best 'right' theology do, if it doesn't change our world?"

By now my friend was wrapped up in his argument on the relativity of Scripture. Some things he told me sounded good. Yet on the whole, his reasoning did not seem to match the picture I had gained from my own reading of Scripture. My friend continued in his endeavor to enlighten my mind: "Just to emphasize the historical accuracy, is to petrify the spiritual, active, living message. To emphasize historical details and their accuracy is to lose sight of the living message and the center of the Bible—Jesus Christ."

During my previous student years, when I investigated the Biblical prophecies about the Messiah and His coming, I never had received the impression that I would lose sight of Him if I paid attention to historical detail about our Lord's incarnation. As a matter of fact He had become more precious to me than ever before. I could see and know from Scripture that Jesus Christ was indeed the Saviour, the Word of God, who had come just as predicted in the written Word and who has given His prophetic Word in His earthly ministry to guide us until He would come again as He promised.

I began to wonder what my friend had in mind when he said that it did not matter whether historical details were accurate or not. Did it not matter for Jesus Christ? Was it not important for Him to be born on time, in the right place, and in the appropriate manner? Did He Himself not say that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35)? Did it not matter for His disciples and the apostles? Did they not build their entire conviction and power of mission on the sure foundation of the Word of God which they quoted in exact fulfillment of His life, death, and resurrection? And did they not do it time and again? Jesus' own affirmation that "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18, NIV)

manifests such a trust and confidence in the abiding validity of the Word of God, even down to little details.² New Testament writers, and Jesus Christ Himself, did not hesitate to base their entire argument upon the wording of the Old Testament,³ in many instances even to the very grammatical form of one word, as, for example, in Gal 3:16.⁴

I continued to wonder, if Jesus and the apostles manifested such a high view of Scripture (i.e. "Scripture cannot be broken" John 10:35), including what one might consider minor historical details of prophecy, all of which was important in its fulfillment,⁵ why should we today depart from their practice? Jesus and the apostles treated the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice. Jesus authenticated His own Messianic mission and work by pointing to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In this respect Jesus and the apostles demonstrated a literal understanding and use of their Bible—the Old Testament. Can I be more Christian today than Christ was Himself? Can I be more apostolic than the Apostles were themselves? Should I not follow the example of Christ and the apostles?

Ellen G. White Comes Into the Discussion

My friend seemed to have sensed my doubts. He tried to comfort my uneasiness by saying, "I have a Christological approach in my theology. And that is what Ellen White told us all along. I just call it 'Incarnational Theology.' By this I mean that I use the incarnation as a model to look at the question of inspiration. Too often we have been afraid to look at the Biblical text honestly because we think we might find some errors that would cause us to throw out the entire book at once because something was wrong. The 'Incarnational Model' has helped me to look at the human side of Scripture with all its imperfections, weaknesses, and mistakes (after all everything human is imperfect—to err is human) and yet it is blended with the divine. God uses the Bible in spite of its shortcomings."

My friend insisted, "God meets men where they are, in their limited social, cultural and temporal settings. Thus, I don't have to be afraid anymore to blend in the human factor but have learned to take the freedom to use my God-given reasoning ability and

admit the difficulties as I find them. After all, even Ellen White said that 'the testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language,'⁶ and that 'the Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. . . . The Bible is given for practical purposes'."⁷ Ellen White wrote, "The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible."⁸ "You see," he triumphantly concluded, "I have even Ellen White on my side. What more can you ask?"

But his usage of Ellen White did not convince me as much as he had hoped it would. Perhaps it was because I have become sensitized by past experience to the conviction that **any** person who uses Ellen White in "obvious" support for his/her position may have a hidden agenda. As one of my progressive teachers once remarked: "Just sprinkle a few nice quotations of Ellen White into your presentation from time to time and you can sell our people almost anything." I remembered this vicious counsel. In addition, even though some of the things he had mentioned did not sound entirely wrong, the trend of his argument and the way he used (or should I say misused) Scripture did not seem to be coming from a position of joyful, Christ-inspired, obedience. It sounded rather like someone who attempts to leave behind the inherent authority of an unwanted and outmoded ancient Book.

Did you notice the subtle shift in the way the words "Bible" and "Scripture" have been used in our conversation. My friend always talked about the Bible as human and relative. For him it is "authoritative" only in a functional sense. Because the church has decided to use the Bible and lives within the Christian tradition the Bible functions "authoritatively." Those who follow the Biblical position use the Bible because it is vested with divine authority.

Two Incarnational Models

As I reflected more about what my friend had told me, I realized the error of his position. Just look at the Incarnational model. This

is indeed a Biblical model because the Bible affirms it. But if one wishes to be true to the Biblical evidence, one has to come to conclusions different from those of my friend. There is indeed a parallel in Scripture between the Word of God who became flesh (i.e. Jesus Christ) and the written Word of God (i.e. Scripture). Jesus is called the Word (John 1:1) or the "Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). In John 17:17 Jesus refers to the written Word as being truth.⁹

After quoting extensively from the Old Testament Scriptures, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews concludes with the words: "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb 4:12).¹⁰ In the same way that Jesus was truly divine and truly human, the Bible is truly divine and truly human. In the same way that we cannot separate in Christ where precisely the divine part starts and where the human ends, we cannot start separating the "eternal" divine aspect of Scripture from the human aspect. The divine and human blend harmoniously together to make one indivisible unit. There is in the Bible an inseparable unity that no human being is able to divide arbitrarily by means of reasonable or experimental criteria. This union of the divine and the human involves an element of mystery that we humans cannot comprehend fully, but we may accept it in faith. When I say "mystery" I mean something that can be known—indeed, that to some extent **must be known**—but it cannot be fully or exhaustively comprehended.¹¹

A "mystery" in this Christian sense is neither an enigma nor a secret but a truth to be proclaimed. It is a truth that engages and challenges the human intellect and yet one that requires humility and submission, because it surpasses human comprehension. In this sense the "mystery" of the blending of the divine and the human is a sign of the divine origin of the Bible. This holds true for the miracle of Jesus Christ's incarnation and also for the miracle of God's written Word the Bible.

This mystery is even deeper, more complex and fascinating than my friend might have realized. It is a mystery that is worthy of continuous pondering because no human being could have invented it. One could even say that this kind of mystery is a "proof"

of its divine origin. Ellen White puts it in the following penetrating words:

The mysteries of the Bible, so far from being an argument against it, are among the strongest evidence of its divine inspiration. If it contained no account of God but that which we could comprehend; if His greatness and majesty could be grasped by finite minds, then the Bible would not, as now, bear the unmistakable evidence of divinity.¹²

Everyone agrees, I suppose, that God and His nature cannot be fully comprehended by humans, no matter how hard we try to think and reason. There is an aspect about God that is beyond our natural grasp. That is why we need revelation. And that is why God graciously has revealed Himself to us so that we **can** know what He has revealed. Although we see as through a dark glass (see 1 Cor. 13:12), nevertheless we do see. The things that God has revealed to us are for us to know (see Amos 3:7).

This divine mystery must not be rationalized away by an overemphasis on the human side to the detriment of the divine (or vice versa). It must be kept together or it is dissolved. If we make it too human, we create a God whose dealings accord to our image and our reason. If we were to do this we would come close to Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) who claimed that all knowledge of God is man's knowledge about himself. God, therefore, is man. That is, our ideas of God are simply reflections of the modes of man's existence. For Feuerbach, God is the product of man's thought and not the other way around.¹³ But in this case God is no longer God, but a god in my hands—a god created according to my image and after my own rational imagination.

The Biblical picture, however, does not dissolve God into something that is human. We are in God's hands and we can reverently acknowledge His unique dealings. Thus we are able to adore Him for being wiser and greater than any human being ever could be.

Jesus Christ became a man in time and space. Yet, this fact did not eliminate his divinity nor did it make him historically relative. In the same way, God's written Word, the Bible, also was given in time and space. But rather than being historically conditioned by immanent cause and effect relations, and thereby being rendered relative and not universally binding, God's written Word is divinely

conditioned **and historically constituted**. Thus it remains binding upon all men at all ages and in all places. It is **God's Word**, revealed to man and written by man under divine guidance and under the supervision of the Holy Spirit.

To argue that to be human necessarily means to be sinful and thus to err and to make mistakes is Biblically wrong. Human nature does not per se include sin. If that were the case, Jesus Christ who was the "second Adam," the real Man, who was truly human should have sinned. But, according to Scripture, Jesus never sinned. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Thus a true Incarnational model of the Bible reflects that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, it is indeed exactly as Christ is, truly divine and truly human, and both together form an inseparable unity. The Bible is not mistaken in what it tells us as He was not mistaken in what He told us. It is fully trustworthy in what it says—it is without "sin" to use the analogical term. In the same way that Jesus did not sin intentionally nor unintentionally Scripture does not give wrong information—intentionally or unintentionally.¹⁴

The Issue of Accommodation

We need to understand the idea of "accommodation" in a correct way. God came to the level of man in revealing Himself. In the same way that Christ became man to talk and minister to humankind and bore a human body with all its limitations and weaknesses (He got tired and hungry) yet was without sin, the language of the Bible is human language. It is not God's logic, or some "perfect super-human" language that no one can understand. Nevertheless, the Creator of humankind, the Creator of our language is perfectly capable of communicating His will to humans whom He has created in His own image with the ability to understand, comprehend, and obey. Why should God not be able to succeed in this?

In the same way that Jesus' human body bore the marks of 4,000 years of sin and degeneration while He was here on earth, yet He Himself was without sin (otherwise He would have needed a Saviour Himself), the words of the Bible are not "God's words, or

superhuman language" but are truly the words of men. (Observe the different styles of the Biblical writers). Had the Holy Spirit mechanically dictated everything to the point of the full exclusion of any human element, the entire Bible would have to be written in exactly the same style. However, God used different human beings, who willingly cooperated with Him, to deliver His words through human agents, yet "without sin," (i.e. not misleading, misinforming, or misrepresenting what Scripture asserts). Scripture is trustworthy in everything that it touches upon. It is described by Ellen White as "the Book of books, which God has given to man as an infallible guide."¹⁵ "The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will."¹⁶

In the same way that Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, was supernaturally conceived yet born by a woman, Scripture as the written Word of God is also of supernatural origin yet delivered through human beings. As far as the incarnation as model is concerned, we can truly speak of an incarnational understanding of Scripture. But let us use the Bible on its own terms to define what a true incarnation model means and teaches.

The Marriage Analogy

Let us turn to another point made by my friend. He used the picture of his marriage and his spouse in order to show that a single error in the Bible should not lead us to abandon the Bible altogether as untrustworthy. After all, nobody (at least no normal spouse) acts like that. If one finds his/her spouse wrong in one point, nobody would conclude that one could no longer trust him/her in any matter.

This analogy, however, overlooks some crucial aspects. First of all, as far as a spouse is concerned, can it ever be claimed that he/she knows everything or is fully perfect? I know that a spouse is limited in knowledge and at times errs. This is to be expected with a spouse. It is part of the nature of the spouse.

But this does not hold true for God. Not only does God claim to be much more knowledgeable than we ever will be, He also claims to be omniscient, a fancy word for being able to know, and in fact, to know everything (cf. Ps. 139:2-3; Isa. 46:9-10; Heb. 4:13). Not

only does He know everything, He also is omnipotent—He can do everything (cf. Gen. 18:14; Ps. 115:3; Matt. 19:26; Rom. 4:17).

Beyond this, God describes Himself as absolutely trustworthy and reliable. He does not lie! He **cannot** lie—it's contrary to His character (Heb. 6:18). To speak un-truth, intentionally or unintentionally, would contradict His character and Word. Either God is what He claims to be or He is the greatest deceiver who has ever existed. It is Satan's aim to depict God as a deceiver because Satan himself is the archdeceiver, he is the devil—the great “diabolos.” He is literally “the one who throws across, who accuses.”

However, God is absolutely trustworthy. He has given His own Son as a proof of His trustworthiness. I think that it is illegitimate to compare any human being with God. No matter whether it is a male or female spouse, he/she will always fall short. God is not human that He should lie. He is God (Num. 23:19).

It may be true that a single error in the Bible would not necessarily warrant the conclusion that everything else is false, but it may call many things into question. John Wesley once said, “If there be any mistake in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth.”¹⁷ Wesley raises the question that if there is one mistake, how can we be sure that there will not be a second, or a third, or a thousand?

How can we know for sure? Because most of the theological message of the Bible is grounded in the historical, and because the historical is open to error, how can we be sure that the theological is correct and not in error as is assumed for the historical? Where does one wish to draw the line?¹⁸ How can one draw the line at all? Do we limited creatures have to sit as judges with our sinful and sin-torn reason as to whether something that our Creator, the Creator of the universe, has said and put in words through human beings can be true or not? Is this not a bit presumptuous?

The Issue of Details

But at this point I can hear my friend raise his voice again. “You are overly pessimistic,” he objects. “You paint the worst possible scenario. That's not fair. As if that is realistic. Hardly anyone ever questions everything in the Bible, even if he is aware

of mistakes. I know many honest, good Christians who love the Lord yet have their reservations about some details in the Bible that are not true."

It is certainly correct that there are some who question some parts of Scripture but hold very strongly to other parts. However, we have to question whether such a position is consistent in itself. Is it in harmony with Scripture? I have often encountered people who began doubting the truthfulness of some particular aspects of Scripture but would feel uncomfortable going beyond certain "boundaries." The latter often are conditioned by their social environment, their friends, or their particular tradition (even SDA-tradition). However, there is nothing in their reasoning that would prevent them from going further, except a subjective decision of their own. Based on their own, human decision (not that of Scripture), **they** subjectively stop at one particular level. What is interesting is that often the "second" and "third" generation, that is, their children, their students, and their followers go a step further, and others even further yet. This historical fact has been observed time and again in many denominations, even in Adventism. I do not wish to be negative at all, but some have left the Adventist message, others have even left the Christian faith altogether and became atheists. This too is a demonstrable historical fact.

Therefore, I prefer to stay with Jesus' own counsel. He calls us to surrender our hearts and minds undivided to Him. This last point, I confessed to my friend, is a crucial one for me. It means that I actually had to submit not only my reasoning powers, my scholarship, and my mind, but also my practice and life, to some higher authority, namely to God and His divinely inspired Word. For me genuine obedience is all-inclusive. I will confess that for me this was the toughest decision, and yet the most crucial one, because it meant the actual surrender of all I had. Instead of setting myself up as the final norm, as one who could judge "objectively" by reason or experience alone without a genuine faith commitment to God, Christ, and the Word of God which is given to us through the Holy Spirit, I had come to realize that the Word of God actually judges me.

The Bottom Line

I also came to realize that I have to stand not only on Scripture but also to stand *under* Holy Scripture. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 1:7; cf Prov. 9:10 and 3:5-6). This meant a transformation of my thinking and of my doing theology. I told my friend, "If you want, you can call it conversion full and complete. It is total conversion, not only in my spiritual heart but also of my thinking and reasoning capacities and all else."

"There is another aspect regarding this issue that I came to realize recently as I read the following statement from the pen of Ellen White:

In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God's Word are set aside for human theories and speculations. Many professed ministers to the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part, They set up *their judgment as superior to the word*; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon *their own authority*. Its divine authenticity is destroyed.¹⁹

As I pondered these words it suddenly dawned on me that there actually exists a close relationship between the concepts *by Scripture alone (sola scriptura)* and *by faith alone (sola fide)*. When we lose sight of the former we also lose sight of the latter. When the Bible is no longer accepted as the final authority, then I have to produce a human "work." It may be through philosophy, science, psychology, or history. I have to depend on the human mind in order to prove that the Bible is God's word before I finally can accept it. In other words, a human "work" is considered necessary in order to achieve this kind of "faith." I gladly confess that "I came to realize, that my thinking was grounded in something other than Scripture alone. I had to unlearn the notion that faith has to be 'earned.' I began to learn anew that trust in God and His word is by faith alone."

"The good thing about all of this is that the Bible became relevant to me again," I witnessed to my friend. "Through dissecting, conjecturing, and reconstructing more or less difficult passages in the Bible according to my own (autonomous) standard of reasoning the Bible had become a lamp without oil to me. But now God's

Word has become the 'living Word of God' with power to control, uplift, and inspire my life."

As I shared my experience and faith pilgrimage with my friend I could sense that he apparently must have experienced something similar. As I looked in his eyes he said, "There might be some truth in what you have just told me. But what do you do with the problem passages after all? Aren't they clearly contradictory? Are you so starry eyed as to pretend that they do not exist? How do you deal with the notorious inconsistencies in the Bible? This is where the rubber meets the road for me."

Right Doctrine from Wrong Texts and with a Wrong Method?

Could it be that New Testament writers used the wrong texts and a wrong method and yet came up with a correct doctrine? Could they thus come up with a valid proof for the divinity of the Messiah? If they indeed quoted out of context, as is often alleged by historical-critical scholars, were the Jews in Jesus time not right in rejecting him as the Messiah? Are there genuine predictions in the Old Testament that find a genuine and literal fulfillment? Or are there only "promises" where it does not matter whether everything is fulfilled exactly as predicted? Could it be that the New Testament writers were guided by the Spirit in their "creative," and that means out of context, interpretation of the Old Testament? Could it be that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets to write down the divine prophetic message later leads other people to conclusions that are not in harmony with the original intent? Can we still trust their conclusions even though we cannot trust their methods? These questions with their obvious implications need to be raised and they deserve to be addressed.

We need to take Scripture's self-attestation seriously, namely that all **Scripture** is inspired or, better, is "God breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). Let us note that Paul says that *Scripture* is inspired. In this text he does not talk about thoughts that are inspired. If Paul is correct in his claim that "all Scripture" is "God breathed," then we should expect harmony and continuity between the Old and New Testaments, rather than "diversity," contradictory statements, and discontinuity.

Although time and space do not allow us to develop a full-

fledged analysis of disputed passages, we will nevertheless point to some important aspects that are involved.²⁰

A classical example of an alleged misquotation is the fulfillment-quotation in the gospel of Matthew of Hosea 11:1. Hosea refers to Israel's Exodus experience, their departure from Egypt, and Matthew 2:15 cites, "Out of Egypt did I call my Son," indicating Jesus' departure from Egypt. If Hosea refers only to a past historical act of God as manifested in the Exodus, then Matthew seems to abuse the context and meaning of Hosea. What, then, is the purpose of Matthew quoting this text?

In looking at this text it should be kept in mind that the New Testament writers often had the larger context in mind out of which they quoted a particular verse.²¹ In the book of Hosea we can see the larger context in the following structure: After an introductory and autobiographical section (Hosea 1-3), which mirrors the tragedy of Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness against God, a court scene begins in Hosea 4:1, where three charges are brought against Israel and her revolt against God: a) "no knowledge of God" (4:2-6:3); b) "no covenant love" (6:4-11:11); and c) "no truth" (11:12-14:9). The end of each charge (Hosea 6:1-3; 11:1-11; 14:1-9), however, concludes with some hope where an eschatological view of better times in the future is presented as a reason for the hope in spite of present distress. It is from this hopeful conclusion in Hosea 11:1 that Matthew takes his quotation. In contrast to the unfaithfulness of Israel who has not kept the covenant and refused to show covenant love Hosea 11 portrays God's persevering and unfailing covenant love which does not permit Him to give up on them. In a similar fashion Matthew's infant narrative stresses God's preserving activity during the child's early years.²²

It should be noted, in addition, that the designation "My Son" in Hosea 11:1 has definite messianic overtones. Walter Kaiser has summarized his discussion of this term as follows:

'My Son,' became a technical term and an appellation that could be applied either collectively to the nation as the object of God's love and election or specifically to that final representative person who was to come in Christ.²³

Thus, the title "My Son" was as messianic as the "Seed" in Genesis 3:15 and 12:7.²⁴

It is interesting to note that Matthew introduces this quotation from Hosea in verse 15 and not after verse 20, where he reports the return of Jesus' family from Egypt. This seems to indicate that the *Exodus* or *departure* from Egypt does **not** seem to be his reason for introducing this quotation at this point. Instead, "the emphasis falls exactly where it did in the context of Hosea: the preserving love of God for his seed, Israel."²⁵ Matthew seems to have had the entire context of Hosea in mind and, therefore, quotes this single verse as a pointer to the larger context of his source. The emphasis seems not to lie so much on the departure point, Egypt, as on the gracious act of God's preserving covenant love. Thus, "there is no distortion or abuse of the context of Hosea by Matthew; nor has he added his own interpretation to the text."²⁶

It seems to me that upon careful study we can recognize time and again that the New Testament is not misusing the Old Testament for its own purposes. As a matter of fact there is no hint whatsoever that Jesus or the apostles were ever charged by the Rabbis of being guilty of misquoting, misusing, or misconstruing Old Testament evidence. Rabbis could and would not have allowed any such lapse to occur. Furthermore, the New Testament writers did not re-insert a new meaning into an Old Testament text that was not there in the first place. They were faithful to the text in their exegesis and acknowledged its divine authority.

But how is it that some things in Scripture are hard to understand, as Peter indicates in 2 Peter 3:16? I often have wondered why God allows difficulties in the Bible. You notice that I use the word "difficulties" and not the word "error." The latter already involves a value judgment where with we sit in judgment over the Word of God and decide what is truth and error from our perspectives and backgrounds.

Perhaps God allowed difficulties and, if we please, discrepancies to be present so that He may test our faith? I cannot help but think so. Although we have made so much progress over the years in understanding these difficult passages, it can hardly be expected that all of them will be explained before our Lord returns in the clouds of heaven. My experience indicates that the passages that challenge me the most in my daily life are not those that I do not fully understand. I am challenged most by those that I clearly

understand. The true challenge that confronts us is to live out what we understand. That will make a difference in this world and the world to come. It will convince other people about the genuineness of our faith. I am persuaded that here lies the real obstacle that keeps other people from making a decision for Jesus Christ.

Satisfactory answers already have been found for many of the difficult passages in Scripture and discrepancies, or alleged errors.²⁷ Solutions have been provided that rest on sound Biblical scholarship and can stand the test of closest investigation.²⁸ It now is up to us as to whether we are willing to move forward in faith. There is ample evidence to trust in the Word of God—in its reliability and trustworthiness. God has given abundant evidence of the divine authority of Scripture and its trustworthiness. The reliability of Scripture has been increasingly confirmed from different angles, insights, and fields of study. Yet God has not removed the possibility of doubt. We need to be reminded that faith rests upon evidence not demonstration.²⁹ In the same way that, in this life, we will not be able to comprehend fully the mystery and beauty of all facets of Christ's incarnation, so we will never comprehend fully everything in the inspired Word of God either.

Our faith in God and our trust in His sure Word is not something that we obtain once for all. Rather it is something that will grow deeper and richer and more beautiful the longer we ponder and reflect upon it and the more we live it. This will be so throughout eternity. Even in eternity we will never exhaust the richness and beauty of God's wisdom, power, and love. Meanwhile we may thank God for what He has revealed to us already. And we need to continue to pray that His Holy Spirit will open our hearts and minds in order that we may discern spiritual things with a spiritual mind, growing in a deeper understanding and love of His Word as giving meaning to all of our life in every facet of our existence.

Endnotes

1 On this question, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats in Leviticus 11: Still Relevant?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 2/2 (1991): 91-125.

2 "The use of the terms 'law' (John 10:34; 15:25; Rom. 3:19; 1 Cor. 14:21), or 'prophets' (Matt. 13:35), where reference is made to passages belonging, strictly

speaking, to other parts of the Hebrew canon, indicates that the New Testament writers viewed the whole Old Testament Scripture as having legal authority and prophetic character." Roger Nicole, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," *Revelation and the Bible*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 140.

3 Cf. Matt. 4:10; 13:35; Mark 12:36; John 19:36-37; Rom. 4:3; 15:9-12; 1 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 3:8, 10, 13.

4 For a fuller discussion, see Nicole, pp. 137-151.

5 Cf. Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," *Scripture and Truth*, edited by D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 19-59, esp. pp. 37-49.

6 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, vi-vii.

7 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 20.

8 Ibid., p. 21.

9 Cf. the parallel statements in the OT where the Psalmist adds: "The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple." Ps 19:7 and in Ps 119:142, 160: "Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true." "All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal." This harmony we can expect because the divine Word in written Form, the divine Law reflects the divine Law-giver, Jesus Christ.

10 For a helpful comparison between Christ the incarnate Word of God and Scripture the written Word of God, see Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. by Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 35-42.

11 On this question of mysteries, see Ellen G. White's insightful chapter "Mysteries of the Bible," pp. 169-172, in her book *Education*.

12 White, *Education*, p. 170.

13 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot with introductory essay by Karl Barth and foreword by H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Harper, 1957).

14 For a helpful discussion on the question of accommodation and a refutation of the idea that accommodation to human language and speech also involves a distortion of truth see Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," pp. 53-57, and note 81 on page 367.

15 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 394.

16 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

17 The full quotation from his Journal from Wednesday, August 24, 1776, reads as follows: "I read Mr. Jenyns's admirable tract on the *Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion*. He is undoubtedly a fine writer, but whether he is a Christian, Deist, or Atheist I cannot tell. If he is a Christian, he betrays his own cause by averring that 'all Scripture is not given by inspiration of God, but the writers of it were sometimes left to themselves, and consequently made some mistakes.' Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth." *The Journal of John Wesley, A.M.*, edited by Nehemiah Curnock (London: Charles H. Kelley, 1909), 6:117.

18 In Rom. 5:12ff, for instance, the apostle Paul builds his argument of righteousness by faith through Jesus Christ, who is the second Adam, on the historicity of Adam and the entrance of death after his sin. The historicity of a

literal seven day creation and fall is, however, heavily disputed by many theologians today. But here, as in many other places in the Bible, the salvific and the historical cannot be separated without serious compromise. Protology and eschatology go together. On this whole question, see the articles by John T. Baldwin, "Progressive Creation and Biblical Revelation: Some Theological Implications," *JATS* forthcoming; Ariel Roth, "How to Invalidate the Bible—Unconsciously: Some Thoughts on Pluralism About Origins," *Adventist Perspectives* 2/2 (Summer 1988): 12-27. See also Frank L. Marsh, "Evolution and the Bible," *Adventist Review* (January 16, 1992): 8-9.

19 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 39 (italics supplied).

20 In the following discussion I rely extensively on the excellent presentation of Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), esp. pp. 43-53. Cf. also G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method," *Themelios* 14/3 (1989): 89-96; Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical 'tupos' Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981). Recently David I. Brewer in his book, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), which is based on his Ph.D. dissertation at Cambridge, comes to the conclusion that the scribal predecessors of the Rabbis in Palestine did not use allegory, did not ignore the context and did not read the text differently to suit their interpretation. The Jewish interpreters in Alexandria, Qumran, and Rabbis after 70 AD did all these things. The different types of interpretive techniques used by these groups suggest that they had different assumptions about the nature of Scripture.

21 This is increasingly recognized by many scholars. See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952); Beale, *ibid.*; Kaiser, pp. 48-53.

22 So Kaiser, pp. 48-49.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

24 See also the discussion of the term "Egypt," which is used by Hosea in different senses, in Kaiser, pp. 50-51.

25 Kaiser, p. 51.

26 Kaiser, p. 53.

27 Some helpful books that deal with various problem passages in Scripture from a perspective of a high view of Scripture are authored by Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988); F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983); Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith* (San Bernadino, CA: Campus for Christ International, 1972); *ibid.*, *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Scriptures* (San Bernadino, CA: Campus for Christ International, 1975).

28 If Edwin R. Thiele of Andrews University, for instance, had not approached the Scriptures from the position of its trustworthiness and reliability, he would have never been able to find the solution to one of the most vexing problems for students of Biblical chronology. Now his solution to the mysterious numbers of the Kings in the OT and the solutions to the numerous alleged contradictions in chronology which defied solutions for centuries has become an accepted position among Biblical scholars worldwide. Cf. Edwin R. Thiele, *The*

Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings (new revised edition; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

²⁸ See Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 169; Heb. 11:1.

*The "friend" referred to in these reflections is a composite of various friends with whom I was engaged recently in conversations regarding the issues mentioned in this paper. To refer to the composite "friend" has allowed me to concentrate on the issues rather than on a single person since the issues of the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture are the center of my reflections.

REVELATION AND ETHICS: QUESTION OF DISTANCE

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Introduction

To write on Christian ethics, as Helmut Thielicke has said,¹ is not an easy task. Ethics is a relatively new science. Although Theology stands on secure groundwork, provided by centuries or millennia of controversies and councils forging and sharpening concepts and doctrines, ethics as science is still in a process of development. Granted, even after centuries of debates, Christian theology is not a monolithic structure. Theologians still disagree among themselves on many issues. However, they do agree on the points of disagreement; and, therefore, one is able to discern broadly-defined schools of thought with which a particular theologian can more or less comfortably identify. From within this context, a theologian continues building up the unfinished consensus of theology.

Within Christian ethics, and particularly Protestant ethics, such identifications are still in a state of flux. Instead of building upon a previously-elaborated Christian moral system, many ethicists seek the base within their theological home.

From this base begins the adventure into the theory and practice of daily moral decisions of life. Whether Christian theology serves as a basis for ethical thinking or a particular system of ethics serves as a foundation, the task of ethics remains a serious assignment. In this essay I propose to consider the first alternative. The

Christian doctrine of revelation will serve as a test case. *My thesis is that revelation is not irrelevant nor without authority for the human, sinful condition because of its supernatural origin.* It is, therefore, not necessary to try making it compatible with the everyday moral dilemmas. Rather, the key to both compatibility and relevance of revelation are rooted in its source and its multiformity, as presented in the Bible.

I suggest that we first look at the relationship between theology and ethics, and the problem of distance. Next, we will examine the ways two prominent scholars have related revelation and Christian ethics. Finally, we will draw some conclusions useful for the task of making Christian ethical decisions.

Theology/Ethics: Relationship

Theology/Ethics Defined

Theology can be defined as a science of religion. Its task is to search for understanding of the content and nature of divine disclosure and to provide coherence in the system of beliefs resulting from that disclosure. It asks the questions *what* is truth, and how should I respond to God's disclosure?

Christian ethics, on the other hand, begins from a theological premise. But it is concerned with *application* (in the human context) of the revealed truth. The task for the ethicist is to relate God's will for humans at the level of personal and interpersonal relations. Bonhoeffer summarizes this distinction succinctly when he says:

The problem of Christian ethics is the realization among God's creatures of the revelational reality of God in Christ, just as the problem of dogmatics is the truth of the revelational reality of God in Christ.²

Consequently, mere *knowledge* of truth is not the ultimate objective of Christian theology. Its purpose should be open-ended, oriented towards human action and conduct, resulting in the restoration of human, personal, social, spiritual and moral wholeness.

The task of ethics can be compared to a role of midwife charged with facilitating the realization in moral life of the truth which is understood and known through theological endeavor. "It is a good, long distance," says James Sellers, "from a biblically and theologi-

cally correct recital of a doctrine of man and concrete ethical-moral guidance on civil disobedience or sexual relations."³ The complexity of moral dilemmas, decisions, actions and their consequences; the incredible deceitfulness and tenacity of sinful conditions; and finally, the general decadence of the social moral fabric; all of these demand purposeful, creative, and committed work for those engaged in the field of Christian ethics.

Function in Union

The distinction between theology and ethics, however, does not mean their separation. This for several reasons.

1. Christian theology and Christian ethics share the same center and the same point of departure: God. Bonhoeffer states: "The point of departure for Christian ethics is not one's own self, or the reality of the world; nor is it the reality of standards and value. It is the reality of God as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ."⁴ Or in T. B. Maston's words: "God is central in the ethics of the Bible as He is in its theology. He is the God not only of the sanctuary but also of the marketplace."⁵

2. Christian theology and Christian ethics share their dependence on Jesus Christ. Christian theology rests on the trustworthy revelation of truth procured by and disclosed in the person of Jesus Christ. (John 1:18) Christian ethics for its part recognizes in Jesus the actualization of that truth. Jesus is the truth put in practice (John 14:6). Thus the possibility of both the knowledge of truth and the practice of truth are assured in Jesus Christ.

3. Finally, Christian theology and ethics find their realization in the multifaceted ministry of the Holy Spirit. Theological truth is revealed through the Spirit's involvement with biblical writers (2 Pet. 1:20, 21), inspiring their minds with divine messages. Furthermore, the Spirit guides and assists the serious student of Scripture in the theological task. (John 16:13-15) Ultimately, it is the Spirit who brings the knowledge of truth to fruition in the individual and corporate life. Thus the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) are also the cardinal Christian moral virtues.

Christian theology naturally flows into ethics. They belong together, even if we separate them for study purposes or for the sake of different tasks assigned to them. Speculative theology is not

biblical theology, just as formal religion is not the religion of Jesus Christ. Only theology which is relevant to life and therefore translated into moral conduct stands firmly on the rock (Matt. 7:25) and can be called Christian theology. In the same way only ethics based on Christian theology, which not only presents the truth of revelation but also the claim of God's revelation upon man, can be called Christian ethics.

The Problem of Distance

As creatures we stand in desperate need of a reliable assessment of our situation, our potential, and the means to achieve this potential. But this knowledge must come from beyond the human realm. We are immersed in time, contingency, subjectivity, fears and sinfulness. We have no vantage point of objectivity for an unbiased self-appraisal. Plato, F. Nietzsche, K. Marx, and J.P. Sartre attempted the impossible: to give a true assessment of human nature, its condition and destiny—from within that same nature.

The message of the Bible is that God has assumed the role of the Word to human beings. This Word is the Word of truth, designed to meet our need and to provide us with the much needed knowledge of our situation, our potential and the means to achieve that potential. Scripture represents the produce and the act of supernatural revelation which comes from beyond our human condition and serves as a reliable source for the search of truth. This divine activity is the starting point for both Christian theology and Christian ethics.

The advantage and the privilege of having a trustworthy communication of knowledge from beyond the human condition becomes, by the same token, a source of difficulties for doing ethics. The supernatural origin suggests remoteness, a distance between the divine will and the human moral agent. The very news that "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;" sounds intimidating to some. Even when God's revelation takes the form of writing it is viewed by some as remote in time and space from the sinful human reality. God is divine and eternal, humans are mortal and contingent; His requirement of perfection appears an impossible assignment.

In short, as we venture from our theological base towards the

realm of the everyday Christian moral life, we are confronted with a sense of distance. The ideal of moral conduct flowing out from revelation appears unreal, unrealistic and unrealizable. The questions multiply.

1. Is it meaningful to speak of revealed morality when there is such a gap between supernatural revelation and the human moral condition?

2. Is it possible to bring from beyond the human realm a reliable and coherent moral framework compatible with human need so that the human heart can generate sufficient internal motivation for willing and heartfelt conformity to that framework?

3. If we stress God's transcendent command, what will happen to human freedom? If, conversely, we emphasize God's immanence and love, what then with human responsibility?

These and a host of other questions multiply, and so does an impressive array of alternative answers to them. The temptation to opt for a different base—such as autonomy of the will (Kant) or historical determinism (Marx)—is very attractive.

However, for our purposes as Christians we ask: *How should we conceive of divine revelation so that its content can be both relevant and beneficial to human moral conduct?* In the process of our quest we shall review the answers given by two prominent scholars: Reinhold Niebuhr first, followed by Carl F. H. Henry.

Reinhold Niebuhr: Revelation as Drama

The human self is involved in dialogue with itself, with other selves, and with God. This dialogue, most of the time, consists of simple communication. Sometimes, however, the dialogues precipitate action. They are enacted. Dialogues "are transmitted into dramas,"⁶ says Reinhold Niebuhr.

The Bible conceives life as a drama in which human and divine actions create the dramatic whole. There are ontological presuppositions for this drama, but they are not spelled out. The drama is told primarily in terms of contest of all men and nations with God, and secondarily in terms of a contest between good and evil in history.⁷

Revelation, according to Niebuhr, takes the form of a drama played on two stages: personal and historical.

Revelation as Private Drama

Revelation happens in history—the private history of every individual. Niebuhr rejects the ontological nature of revelation of the “encounter” kind. Ontology to him is too speculative and mysterious. Private revelation, in Niebuhr’s view, is synonymous with what is called “general revelation.” Here is the summary of the distinctive features of private revelation.

1. Private revelation is universal in scope. It is “in a sense, synonymous with ‘general revelation’ . . .” and “it is no less universal for being private.”⁸

2. Private revelation is an experience because of which “men are ‘without excuse’ if they do not glorify God as God.”⁹

3. A revelational experience of this kind is not a special type of experience. In fact, any experience can be revelatory if faith discerns it as such.

4. Private revelation is a “sense of being confronted with a ‘wholly other’ at the edge of human consciousness. . . .”¹⁰

Private revelation is the testimony in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands. . . . The soul which reaches the outermost rims of its own consciousness, must also come in contact with God, for He impinges upon that consciousness.¹¹

5. “The knowledge of God is thus not a supernatural grace which is a ‘further gift’ beyond man’s essential nature. It is the requirement of his nature as free spirit,” and a constituent element of his nature.¹² God is accessible through human nature as spirit.

6. Private revelation provides:

a. A sense of God’s presence, a sense of dependence on Him, and of reverence for Him.

b. A sense of moral obligation.¹³

c. A longing for forgiveness. (This feeling is not clear on the level of private revelation.)

d. A sense of God as Creator, Judge and Redeemer.

Revelation as Special, Historical Drama

Private revelation is only the preliminary foundation of special (or public) revelation, which completes, clarifies and puts the content of private revelation into a proper perspective. Here again, the

experience is not ontological but historical in nature. Special revelation involves a specific action of God in history (drama of history) in which He discloses Himself as a "Thou." Niebuhr clarifies:

Faith in the transcendent God, as revealed in personal experience and in the character of the whole creation, is the ground upon which the Biblical historical revelation is built up. . . This historical revelation is by no means simply the history of man's quest for God or the record of man's increasingly adequate definitions of the person of God. . . It is rather the record of those events in history in which faith discerns the self-disclosure of God. What it discerns are actions of God which clarify the confrontation of man by God in the realm of the personal and individual moral life.¹⁴

Special revelation is an event, any event, in which faith discerns "ultimate significance" and "special depth" of meaning of life and human destiny.¹⁵

The content of this special revelation can be summarized with one word: meaning. For Niebuhr this word stands first of all for coherence in a system of ethical principles. But more importantly, it denotes victory of good over evil. Evil and sin engender meaninglessness. History is as a result incomplete and absurd. Completion of history through victory of good over evil bring meaning to life.

But how is a human being to discern either meaning or coherence, rather than fate or absurdity? The answer is, faith. Reason will find neither coherence nor victory because it functions only within history. Faith discerns God dimly (a private revelation) but more clearly in special events "as the structure, the law, the essential character of reality, as the source and center of the created world against which the pride of man destroys itself in vain rebellion."¹⁶

So, for example, in the drama of crucifixion "all forms of human righteousness are made problematic,"¹⁷ and human beings are found guilty and sinful. "Revelation in Christ thus clarifies the human predicament which we have defined as the mystery of man's misery."¹⁸ This clarification of human condition is revealed finally in the forgiveness of God, which makes the moral ideal more meaningful.

Revelation and Ethics

Religion based on revelation stands above Marxist ideology on

the one hand and the religion of culture on the other. Marxist ideals end up in utopia because the working class is powerless to bring about the golden age; and moreover, the elite inevitably degenerate their absolute values into selfish complacency.

In the religion of culture the ideal is blurred through some mystical discipline, as in Buddhism. The temporal life fades away and the sense of the transcendent becomes absorbed in the absolute.

Religion of revelation escapes both of these dangers. Revelation provides the dimension of depth without destroying the natural historical realm. Its vehicle for communication is neither mystical nor rational but rather mythical in nature. The myths of the Bible [Niebuhr's liberal view of the Bible] present powerful truth of the transcendent as involved in, but not identified with, the process of history. Herein is the birth place of ethics. Niebuhr explains:

The dimension of depth. . . creates the tension between what is and what ought to be. It bends the bow from which every arrow of moral action flies. Every truly moral act seeks to establish what ought to be, because the agent feels obligated to the ideal, though historically unrealized, as being the order of life in its more essential reality.¹⁹

Further, this dimension of depth enables religious morality to withstand the pressure to capitulate to the contemporary values of any age by tracing "every force with which it deals to some ultimate origin and to relate every purpose to some ultimate end."²⁰

Finally, revelation discloses the moral ideal of love which transcends the "give and take" of mutual relationships. It "pulls" and "drives" moral life towards the sacrificial love illustrated by the cross, love which cannot survive within the realm of history.

Critical Evaluation

This very abridged survey shows the important role of revelation as he defines it in Niebuhr's view of ethics. Both relevancy and benefits of revelation for ethics are evident. Nevertheless it creates some difficulties for a believer in biblical revelation. . .

1. In order to assure the relevance of revelation for ethics Niebuhr places revelation not above, on the side of, or below the drama of moral life, but within that drama and on the same stage. The very moral act may, in fact, have revelatory significance. He is

opposed, and rightly so, to a concept of divine communication which would be remote from the historical context of moral dramas. But Niebuhr goes farther. The revelation not only plays its role on the stage of history, it is historical in nature. Its source may well be beyond history but its transcendence measures equal to the transcendence of human spirit.

What that implies is that Niebuhr sees no place for the divine "measure" of transcendence in revelation. *We do not have the Word of God to guide us. The most we can expect is the words of men in the mythical form.* Niebuhr strives to prove that myth is a richer form of communication than rational propositions, but he still maintains the human nature of the Word.

2. If, however, Niebuhr trades an objective revelation contained in a written document for Myths—all for the sake of a moral relevance—further problems arise. For ethical purposes the Bible becomes simply a "case book". In fact, says Niebuhr, there was no garden, no fruit, no serpent. The fall was not a historical event. It was revealed to us as a "case" so that in these mythical samples our "cases" may be included.²¹ Revelation is open to our interpretation, to our faith's perception, and as a foundation for any moral framework it is subject to our reliability. For the sake of relevance revelation is relativised.

3. Niebuhr would argue that we can speak of the absolute only in the terms of myth. In this way the absolute moral ideal confronts the agent without losing "pull" for his or her will to obey. Rather, we create the healthy tension between the moral requirement of revelation and what is achievable in history. But, if revelation's requirement is only as absolute and as transcendent as human spirit is, the tension is remarkably reduced. The moral arrows will not fly any farther than human conception of the ideal.

4. Finally, even if, as Niebuhr claims, the ideal of sacrificial love can retain its absoluteness, no one in his view, is able to practice it without becoming a victim. The revealed ideal is an "impossible possibility." It is possible only at the end of time—in the eschaton. Niebuhr does not explain this realization nor this eschaton in any way relevant for ethics, and this is where the weakness lies. What happens to an ethic that has an absolute ideal which is impossible to reach? Without a doctrine of the Holy Spirit Niebuhr has no way

of maintaining motivation for moral action and conduct before the eschaton (end of time).

It is evident that Niebuhr's perception of the need for relevance and beneficence of revelation to ethics is accurate. The difficulties appear in his adaption of revelation to the human condition, thereby reducing its effectiveness for moral life.

Revelation as Communication: Carl F. H. Henry:

In evangelical circles revelation is conceived as a rational communication of intelligible truth, rather than a participation in a dramatic experience. The receiver of revelation plays a more passive role. We will briefly emphasize important features in Carl F. H. Henry's understanding of revelation, which in general follows the traditional pattern of the doctrine. Our concern is again, whether his view makes revelation both relevant and beneficial to the human, moral situation. Several features characterize Henry's view of revelation.

Nature of Revelation

Rational. "Issuing from the mind and will of God, revelation is addressed to the mind and will of human beings. As such it involves primarily an activity of consciousness that enlists the thoughts and bears on the beliefs and actions of its recipient."²² The image of God in man is primarily the rational capacity. "A rational God has ordered a rational universe in which rational creatures created in His image are to think His thoughts after Him, and do them."²³ Thus revelation is primarily activity of minds (that of God and man).

Logical. Revelation follows the laws of logic. There is no incoherence nor contradiction in divine communication of truth.

Propositional. God communicates His will and truth in intelligible units of meaning, thus avoiding the fluidity of dramas of private or historical type. These propositions are communicated via the inspirational process to prophets, apostles and other biblical writers who recorded them for future generations.

Objective. This objectivity characterizes both actions and words of God. The revelational events such as the virgin birth and resurrection were real events, open to objective inquiry and descrip-

tion. It is true, however, that those who witnessed the events did not always recognize their full meaning. This is why God decided to add the "sound track" to His actions. Through inspiration, vision, direct speech, etc. He gives the authoritative interpretation, so as to prevent private and subjective explanations. These are the basic characteristics of revelation. We now need to identify its content.

Content of Revelation

Truth about God. Revelation presents absolute truth about God's nature and activity as well as human nature and destiny. This is the only source of rationally understandable communication claiming absolute truth.

God's Will. Revelation communicates God's will to and for humans. The information is without contradiction and is absolutely trustworthy.

Moral Requirements. Revelation discloses moral requirements for human beings. Christian morality is revealed morality, and Christian revelation contains direct moral communication. These moral duties are expressed, first of all, in the life and character of Jesus Christ. Jesus reveals to us who we are meant to be. Second, moral requirements reach us in the form of orders and commands from the sovereign God. These standards are absolute and universally valid.

Christ's Life. Christ's life, however, is seen as an impossible ideal. "Christ convinces us that His precepts and example are beyond man's reach." However, Henry hastens to say that, the impossibility is not because the ideal was never meant to be possible—as in Niebuhr, nor because His moral faultlessness is for "gods" only, but because of the rebellion of our race. "A holy humanity seems miraculous only because we love our sin too much."²⁴

Reception of Revelation

Since the Bible is the main instrument of revelation, and because its content is rational, logical, and propositional, the obvious conclusion is that human reason grasps revealed content just as it perceives other rational communication.

Even when Henry speaks of illumination by the Holy Spirit as

another means by which the believer appropriates revelation, rational capacity is central.²⁶ Illumination helps human understanding, and not the will, emotions or conscience.

Revelation and Ethics.

How is Henry's concept of revelation relevant and beneficial to Christian ethics? Again several points need to be mentioned.

1. Revelation and ethics do not stand at a distance from each other. On the contrary, revelation makes the ideal moral requirement known to us through the life and example of Jesus and through rational commands.

2. The rationality of revelation is another way in which Henry draws revelation close to moral life. Coherence and logical consistency are an integral part of moral reasoning as well.

3. The availability of a written codebook for reference, instruction, and nurture in moral knowledge reduces further the distance between revelation and ethics.

Critical Evaluation.

Henry's heavy emphasis on reason may prove to be overextended or lacking a more rounded presentation.

1. It appears that revelation is too narrowly focused, not by a loss of objectivity (as in Niebuhr), but by the overemphasis on reason. While simple intelligence is of primary use for grasping certain kinds of information, it certainly stands disarmed for perceiving some other kinds. How is reason useful in communicating to us the meaning of Abraham at Moriah, Job on his ash heap, or even Jesus in the manger? Knowledge communicated by revelation through events of tragedy or happiness is not primarily rational in nature, and yet very relevant to ethics.

2. Can the human will be sufficiently motivated by rational knowledge alone? Isn't there a gap between knowing and doing as is illustrated in the experience of Christianity?

3. It is surprising to find that Henry considers the moral ideal as revealed in the Bible an impossible ideal. Granted, the reason is our sinfulness, not weakness of moral authority, but the result is not much better. The strength of an absolute command which is understood as impossible is easily relativised to the level of human

possibility. If I have to, but I can't, I will consider what I can as sufficient.

It seems to me that the possibility of obedience is the matter of faith and growth on the human side, and the matter of love and omnipotence (Holy Spirit) on God's side. The risk of weakening the moral "drive" is lessened, if we take the moral imperative at face value (Phil. 4:13). Perhaps, He only waits for an opportunity to show what humans can become when they identify with Omnipotence. God's transcendent command is not more transcendent than His grace. Only He knows what we can be with His help.

Conclusion

And now, a few concluding comments. In retrospect, my thesis is not far off the mark. I proposed that revelation, as it is described in Scripture, is neither irrelevant nor incompatible with the task of ethics; consequently, we need not try to simplify it for that purpose. Rather, the unifying factor for both is the divine Source, God.

It seems evident that both Niebuhr and Henry, due to their individual apologetic concerns try to "adapt" revelation in order to make it more relevant and useful in ethics.

1. Both stress the absolute requirement of a moral ideal; yet both (for different reasons) consider this ideal impossible. The result is similar: the tension is lowered and moral arrows do not fly.

2. Both have a focused view of revelation. Henry narrows it to rational communication, and Niebuhr to historical dramas of life. But why cannot it be both and much more?

3. According to Niebuhr, Scripture is little more than a case-book containing information in the form of myths and symbols. The moral agent must be very active, creative and morally uncorrupted to interpret cases to his/her situation, and then, knowing that he/she has time until the eschaton (the end), the agent must nevertheless be motivated for action.

4. According to Henry, Scripture is almost a codebook of moral behavior. The moral agent must have an uncorrupted reason to discern clearly what is required. He/she must not use reason for rationalizing away the requirement on the basis that it is an impossible code anyway.

So, I wonder why there should be an either/or between

codebook and casebook? Why should there even be a distance between them? Such a separation in the content of revelation is detrimental for both, doing ethics and being moral. Isn't the Bible both the authoritative statement of what and who we should be, as well as a record of cases of those who heard the Word and applied it? In no court of law (except in anarchy or oligarchy) would cases stand above a nation's constitution. Even God's actions are constitutional. If we relegate biblical authority to the authority of a casebook, why should *biblical* cases be more normative than yours and mine? Didn't Jesus say "do as they say, not as they do"?

5. I also wonder why it is necessary to adapt and reduce revelation to either reason or historical dramatic events, or even personal ontological encounter as in Barth? The multiformity of revelation is biblically attested. "In many and various ways God spoke . . ." says Paul in Hebrews 1:1. God is both anxious to speak to us and He is a creative communicator. Donkey, stones (urim & thumim), lots, sundials, in addition to other more frequent modes, all stand at His disposal when He wants to say something. Could it be that this multiformity of revelation is there because of multitudes of different conditions, different moral agents, and the rich variety of each human constitution?

6. Finally, divine revelation of moral duty stands united in God's being. There is no schizophrenia between His will and His love, between truth and goodness, obligation and happiness. Requirement is as imperative as love is pure; it is as intransigent as goodness is true; it is as meaningful as happiness is obligatory. The solution is not in watering down the requirement. Just taste and see; Scripture invites. I fear that reductionism in revelation in order to make it manageable in ethics could be setting the stage for work-ethics and work-salvation. It brings the moral "ought" too close to the immoral "is."

Revelation in all its spectral colors is relevant, authoritative, compatible and beneficial for ethical inquiry. It is, therefore, not necessary to reduce, remodel, or adapt it. Three keys present themselves to open the doors of our inquiry: (1) The first key, is to recognize the richness of the varied forms of the revelational models recorded in Scripture. (2) The second key, is to acknowledge that the variety of the revelational models noted in the Scriptures does

not imply variety in the authoritativeness of the revelation for ethics. The same God stands behind any revelation approach He may use. (3) The third key to the relevance and authority of revelation to ethics rests in recognizing the nature of God, the morally perfect "Case," in Whom truth and its application are one.

The requirement in Scripture is absolute and Christian ethics recognizes it as such, giving the Author of revelation a chance to provide the grace for the moral life. The solution is not to reduce the tension but to increase our faith in the competence of the Holy Spirit. In Christian Ethics the problem of distance from Christian theology is only apparent, not real.

Endnotes

¹ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 3.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan 1955), p. 57.

³ James Sellers, *Theological Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 75.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan 1955), p. 56.

⁵ T. B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, (Waco: Word, 1967), p. 282.

⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and Dramas of History*, (SDH) (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 44.

⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Biblical Thought and Ontological Speculation in Tillich's Theology." In *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, p. 216-227. Kegley and Brettall (New York: MacMillan, 1952), p. 216.

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 127.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 131.

¹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹² Ibid., 271. Here is another point at which Niebuhr diverges from encounter, especially Barthian theology.

¹³ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 136-137.

¹⁵ See *The Self and Dramas of History*, p. 66., and Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1953), p. 197.

¹⁶ *Nature and Destiny of Man*, p. 144

¹⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 141.

¹⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) p. 139.

¹⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 5.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

21 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, (New York: Charles Scribners, 1937), p. 10-12.

22 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. III (Waco: Word, 1977), p. 248.

23 Carl F. H. Henry, "Revelation and the Bible," in *Christianity Today* 2. (1958): 15-17, p. 16.

24 Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), p. 413.

25 Ibid. p. 273.

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